

SATURDAY

MAY 2

TEN CENTS

# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Gypsy  
Fantasy

by  
Paul  
Regard

"The Haunted Legacy"

—ARTHUR BOSTON

MAY 2, 1914

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MAY 2, 1914





## About Wrinkles

If the skin be kept soft and smooth, wrinkles may be staved off almost indefinitely. But the question is—How is it possible to achieve this?

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Complexion  
Soap*

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Complexion*



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Street and No. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



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	Line Rate	Special Combination Rate
The Munsey	\$2.00	
The Cavalier (Weekly)	.60	
The Argosy	1.30	
Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	\$5.20
All-Story Weekly	.80	Less 3% cash discount.
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May 30 All-Story Forms Close May 9

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the classified departments of the Munsey Publications. Mailed anywhere on request.

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In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention ALL-STORY WEEKLY.



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Vol. XXXI

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FRANK A. MUNSEY, President.

ROBERT H. TUCKERMAN, Secretary.

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**Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of  
ALL-STORY WEEKLY, published weekly at New York,  
N. Y., required by the Act of August 24th, 1912.**

NOTE—This statement is to be made in duplicate, both copies to be delivered by the publisher to the Postmaster, who will send one copy to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Classification), Washington, D. C., and retain the other in the files of the Post-Office.

Editor—T. N. Metcalf, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—T. N. Metcalf, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—Wm. T. Dewart, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.

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**Owners: (If a corporation, give names and addresses of stockholders holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of stock.)**

Frank A. Munsey, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.

**Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:**

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against  
The Frank A. Munsey Company.

WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of April, 1914.

J. D. BROPHY, Notary Public No. 485, New York County.

(My commission expires March 31, 1915.)

SEAL

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# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XXXI

MAY 2, 1914.

No. 1

## The Haunted Legacy

By  
Paul Regard



A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### OUT OF THE INVISIBLE.

**A**LMOST before the limousine came to a standstill young Turga had thrown open the door and was darting across the sidewalk. He had tea-ed and tangoed for half an hour longer than he should have done, and he was in danger of being late for a dinner engagement.

It was his twenty-first birthday. The day had been full of excitement and drinks of one kind or another, and his nerves were on the jump. Youth and nerves were both in his present haste, yet as the street door closed behind him he paused.

In his hand was a soiled, yellow envelope. How it had got there he wasn't quite sure. He had a vague recollection of having passed some one on the outer steps. He wasn't sure. Yet there was the envelope.

It was odd. Athwart his high-strung nerves there swept, very lightly, a minor chord of uneasiness—a ghostly hand on the strings of a harp. He turned and threw a glance back in the direction from which he had just come.

Waiting automobile—a few nondescript pedestrians—general impression of a misty, autumnal evening, with the lights on streets and passing vehicles showing dimly—and that was all.

No one in the lobby, no one lurking on the steps, and yet the impression was growing stronger, now that he took thought, that there had been somebody there—a man, gaunt, dark—dark because the only really noticeable thing about him was the whites of his eyes.

Turga looked down at the missive again with a shuddering little smile. For a second or two he was almost tempted to cast it from him as a thing unclean. He mentally decided to burn his gloves, at any rate.

Still holding the yellow envelope in his hand, he entered the elevator and was carried to his bachelor quarters on the top floor.

An aged man servant was there to receive him—a man with a swarthy complexion and glowing dark eyes, with the stamp of strength and passion about him still despite his snow-white hair.

His appearance, as well as his language when he spoke, showed unmistakably that he and his young master were sprung from the same race.

For Turga also was dark—dark, slim, elegant—and his eyes had all the sombrous luster of the East.

"What is this thing, Paulo?" asked Turga, with a little laugh, as he allowed the servant to take his hat and stick. "Begging letter, I suppose."

Paulo took the letter as well, just as he had taken hat and stick, with unsmiling humility; but as he looked at the yellow envelope a gradual change of expression came over his face.

"Open it," young Turga flung over his shoulder as he strode through the padded luxury of his drawing-room into the room beyond. He had already floundered through his bath and into fresh linen when Paulo appeared again.

In one of his hands the servant still held the yellow envelope, and in the other was a crumpled sheet of paper. He was trembling. His eyes glowed, and he smiled slightly.

"It is the call, sir," he said in the

same musical language which Turga had used a little while before in addressing him.

"What call?"

Turga was struggling to get his tie just right, and didn't even turn. But he let his eyes drift beyond the shoulder of his reflection to where the reflected Paulo stood. What Turga saw in the old man's face brought him round with a recurrence of that same feeling of uncanniness he had experienced a little while before in the lower hall.

"What call, Paulo?" he asked, with a touch of irascibility. "Nothing doing for to-night, at any rate; I'm late now."

"It is for to-night, sir."

With visible constraint of the excitement which illumined his face, Paulo stepped forward with the paper outheld. Turga took it with a little gesture of impatience. He read a single line:

Come with Paulo at nine o'clock.

The only signature was a symbol in the form of a cross, to the arms of which were added winglike projections.

"Why, this is absurd!" he exclaimed. "It is necessary for me to be at the Plaza in fifteen minutes. I'm late now."

But even as he spoke he had a creeping sensation that the thing was not absurd. Paulo had never looked nor acted like this. Moreover, he felt that at last he was on the verge of enlightenment as to the mystery which had enshrouded his life.

It made him gasp. He knew so little about himself! All that he did know had been told him by Paulo. That he was rich, that he was noble—these things he had accepted as naturally as he accepted the color of his hair. So had it been even with his name.

He was Count Carlos Turga. No one had ever questioned it, he himself least of all. And Paulo was his servant.



"Look here, Paulo," he said after a frowning pause. "I ask you what's the meaning of this confounded tomfoolery—an anonymous letter, go with you whether I want to or not? I call it cheeky. They can go to the devil!"

The boy was speaking to convince himself, not Paulo. The old servant listened without change of expression.

"You'll have to go, sir."

"Why?"

"It is important, sir."

"And if I refuse?"

The servant slowly shook his head.

"You can't refuse, sir," he said with meek obstinacy.

"I say why not?" cried Turga. He was working himself into a passion. "Do you think I'm going to disappoint my hostess at this hour?"

"You have time now, sir, to make your excuses."

Turga had finished dressing. For a moment or two he stood and looked at Paulo, with his slim, young form drawn up very straight and his splendid eyes blazing. Into the dusk of his cheeks there had crept an underglow of pink, such as might have come into the face of a dark-complexioned girl.

"To blaze with excuses!" he said. "I'm twenty-one. I'm master of my own movements, I imagine."

"The paper had the mark on it," Paulo sighed, with more than paternal patience.

"That swastika thing?"

"The winged cross."

"Winged fiddlesticks—"

"Shall I call up the Plaza, sir?"

Young Turga threw his clenched fists into the air above his head and grated a half-articulate curse.

"You'll drive me crazy, Paulo! What is this thing—or have you gone mad?"

Paulo smiled slightly.

"It is the call, sir," he said again as their dark eyes took contact without flinching. "The days of your preparation are over. Here is the winged cross to prove it. At nine o'clock you'll come with Paulo and

learn many things that he can't answer."

"And if I make them wait?"

"You won't make them wait."

Turga started to speak again, then dropped into a chair.

"Call the Plaza," he said in desperation.

## CHAPTER II.

### INTO THE UNKNOWN.

It was one of those misty nights in October when all material things are dissolved into a sort of vague unreality. There had been a little fog toward sundown, but this had increased with the advancing night. It grew heavier still as the automobile made its way down-town.

Turga was alone, for Paulo had taken his seat outside where he could direct the chauffeur on this strange excursion.

The young man had plenty of time to meditate. The night outside was symbolical in its mystery and gloom of the scarcely less impenetrable night in his own mind and heart.

Not for the first time—but more profoundly perhaps—he considered the facts and the circumstances of his career. As far back as his memory could go he had been a creature apart. He had never known family ties or affections, except as these came to him through the presence of the old servant. There had always been wealth, but the source of this wealth was as unknown to him as the source of his very existence.

Yet he was conscious that he had always been the object of unremitting care. No youth—and he knew many sons of families eminent socially and financially—had ever been more carefully clad, educated, and looked after generally.

Now he was twenty-one. He told himself that he was a man. With what he considered a man's courage and *sang-froid*, he attempted to con-

front not only the past riddles, but the present one.

The automobile had entered a region of deserted streets—streets that in the daytime teem with their striving millions, inhabited at night by mere memories. It was as a city of the dead; a city itself dead, now still and silent where a little before it was so instinct with life.

Through street after street they passed, each more deserted than the last; dark and silent houses peering down upon them; each succeeding lamp-post surmounted by a waning, sickly glow—as though these last sentinels of human activity were themselves discouraged, about to yield up their spirits to the triumphant gloom.

It was at the end of one of these streets, which had seemed interminable to the young man in the comfortable luxury of the limousine, that the automobile halted.

A moment later Turga confronted his servant on the sidewalk. Turga was still in evening dress. His silk hat was pushed back at a boyish angle of challenge. He stood with his feet apart and his chin down.

For a moment Paulo regarded him with that same cryptic smile that had been on his lips back in the apartment.

"I'm glad to see, sir, that you are not alarmed."

"Not alarmed, certainly not," said Turga. "But, by the Lord Harry, Paulo, if you've begun to joke with me at your age—"

The smile disappeared from the face of the old servant. Instead there appeared an expression of almost religious exaltation.

"It is no joke, sir," he whispered.

He turned and spoke a few words softly to the chauffeur, who thereupon touched his cap, resumed his seat, and prepared to drive away. He had not even paused to give Turga a glance—a most extraordinary thing for a well-trained chauffeur, as Turga knew him to be.

Ordinarily, a young man of distin-

guished appearance and arrayed in evening clothes would have attracted attention in that part of town. Yet, the occasional pedestrians whom they encountered passed them by without apparent notice. It was almost as though they were invisible.

The automobile had carried them through the down-town business section to the fringe of one of those lost residential districts—once aristocratic, now thick-coated with grimy squalor. It was a lugubrious place, where every house might have been the birthplace and home of tragedy; where dim alleyways led to dim, suggestive courts; where doors were open on black interiors.

The only signs of life were occasional frightened cats, starved and unclean—these and a few furtive men and limping women, the occasional squall of suffering children.

Turga was beyond the point of asking questions. He had never been in a place like this—not that he remembered. With a little internal clutching at his heart, he asked himself if it were possible that he had sprung from such surroundings—that this was the hideous geography of his origin.

Paulo did not enlighten him. Paulo had nothing to say. Once Turga had glanced at the old servant—had seen that rapt expression that had come there a while before when they were still standing at the side of the automobile.

It was evident that the old man knew where he was going. He walked with the air of one who treads a familiar path. He looked neither to right nor to left. He seemed to be absorbed in his own thought.

That they were near the river Turga knew. In the air was the damp reek of sea-fog and ships, of tar and bilge and ooze, and occasionally the smell of queerly aromatic cargoes from the far places of the world.

They came at last to the door of what appeared to be a deserted ware-

house. It was a large, low building of brick.

Over the door, almost illegible in the dim light, a yard-high expanse of scaling paint still proclaimed the name of "W. G. Frail." Turga started. He knew the Frails very well—from a distance—a rich and famous family.

Without pause, still intent on his secret broodings, Paulo brought out a key and unlocked the door. A moment later they had stepped inside and the door was closed behind them.

Turga felt a hand on his arm, whether Paulo's or not he could not say. At any rate, there was something unfamiliar about it.

Paulo had taken his arm, it is true, once or twice before in his life, when Turga had been having too much of a celebration; but the action then had always been timid and friendly.

There was nothing timid in the hand on his arm at the present time. It had the undefinable feel of authority about it—an authority which Turga, for some reason or other, neither questioned nor resisted. He told himself that he was in for an adventure, and that he would see it through.

There followed an interminable promenade across a rough plank floor. Not a word was spoken. No gleam of light came from any direction.

They passed through another door. There was a change of atmosphere; the air had become closer, damper, subterranean.

Upon Turga's straining senses there came two things—a recurrence of aromatic odors, very faint, and, fainter still, the sound of weird music and many voices.

### CHAPTER III.

#### WITCHES' SABBATH.

At some time in the remote past the place had probably been used as a storage-cellar for alcoholic liquors—possibly Jamaica rum. The sweetish smell of spirits was still there.

There was a dim forest of brick pillars supporting the low, brick arches of the roof. What light there was came from what seemed to Turga as the remote distance—a suggestion of red and yellow, such as might be thrown out by either a camp-fire or by Venetian lanterns unsteadily suspended from moving hands.

They had come through the last door. He turned to look at his erstwhile invisible guard. It was Paulo.

From the farther end of the grotto-like place in which they found themselves there still came that confused babble of speech and intermittent gusts of music which had reached them before the last door had opened.

Without preliminary Paulo whistled—a high, shrill blast, with a little quaver on the end of it.

After that silence fell. Silent were their footsteps on the damp, earthen floor as they walked rapidly forward. The only sound that broke the stillness was the occasional dripping of water, the faint crackle of fire, and the bubbling murmur of a boiling pot.

Turga saw, fitfully outlined in the uncertain glow, the segment of a living circle—the faces of men and women, each impressed somehow with the seal of savagery, of cunning and cruelty and excitement.

Then the music broke out again, a wild, minor chant beginning with the quavering falsetto of some old man or woman, he knew not which, and gradually accumulating the hushed, strange cadence of other voices. And in these voices was the suggestion of the same things that he had seen in those oddly limned faces—savagery, cruelty, excitement.

As they passed the last row of pillars that barred his view, his first impressions were verified—both verified and magnified.

The circle was complete—men and women, perhaps two hundred of them, most of them old, some of them young, all seated on the floor, except for one old hag.

She it was, evidently, who was acting as mistress of the Satanic choir. She stood in the center of the circle, a grotesque figure—a grotesque silhouette against the red and yellow glow of an open fire over which an iron pot was simmering.

She appeared now large, now small, as the flames rose and fell; and again, almost invisible, by some trick of the uncertain light, as though she were not a creature of flesh and blood at all, but merely the phantom of a disordered brain.

It was some time before Turga's intellect resumed its proper functions. He was like a swimmer who had been cast into the middle of a whirlpool—the rushing of sensations had been too complex, too confusing, too overwhelming.

Then he began to recognize some of the words of the chant. He heard "Fate," "Doom," "Destruction." These words might have applied to his own impending destiny; but, before he could formulate the thought, he heard a name other than his own—"Frail."

He found himself at the center of the circle. He was standing just back of the Satanic choir-mistress. Paulo had brought him there, but Paulo had disappeared into the circle of dimly seen faces and figures.

"Fate," "Doom," "Destruction," "Frail"—the words were assuming their proper sequence in his brain. It was the language that he and Paulo had always used when speaking to each other—a dialect of the Bohemian mountains.

They were chanting the doom of the Frails—all that was left of the race of the great Count von Frelinghuysen, who had fled to America from Bohemia and changed his name half a century ago.

Turga had bent every faculty now to understand. He and Hugh Frail had been classmates in the same university, belonged to the same clubs—in a manner belonged to the same clique,

though they had never been in any sense intimate.

It was not so much a song—song would have been too pretty a term for that devilish chant—as it was a *recitative*, in which the old woman standing in front of him shrilled her uncanny falsetto—the crazy winging of a wounded bat—trailing along with it the sibilant weight of the chorus.

*Aie*, the lord-count was a mighty man,  
And he builded his castles of blood  
and gold,  
Blood of our youth, the gold of our  
clan,  
But this is the end of the fated span;  
Behold, behold!  
We take again what was never sold.

If there is such a thing as fate in the lives of men, this appeared to be the temple of it, the woman in the center of the circle its high priestess. Her incantation was not devoid of logic, despite the apparent frenzy she threw into it. There was no denying that great families grew up, then decayed and disappeared like the trees of a forest.

That this hour was impending for the Frail family was conceivable. It was even conceivable that Turga himself was the chosen instrument to this end.

The longer he stood there the more completely he surrendered both will and personality. Upon him was the omnipotent grip of destiny. Destiny had provided him with all things. Destiny was his creator. He had never felt it before, but he felt it now—that forever afterward, in all things, by day and by night, he could not otherwise move or think or feel.

Suddenly silence fell on the assemblage, and he was looking into the beady, inscrutable eyes of the old woman. She was very wrinkled, very yellow and terrible; yet her ugliness had about it something of the majesty of age and infinite intelligence.

"Who are you?" she asked.

In the tremendous silence Turga heard his own voice recite his name,



age, address. Each syllable he pronounced was echoed in a whisper from the circle.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BAR SINISTER.

THERE followed another period of silence. Turga stood very straight. He made a proud young figure standing there—proud and incongruous in his evening clothes there in the dank crypt with no other light than that of the open fire, confronted by the ancient witch, circled by her fantastic band of followers. Her eyes held his, beady and inscrutable.

"Yes, that name will do," she said in soothing tones widely different from those she had used in her incantation. "But the time has come for you to know the truth. You, also, are a Frelinghuysen, my chick. Yes, you're of the noble blood—the noble black blood. Left-handed—left-handed."

"I'm right-handed," said Turga, with that slight blush of his.

"Left-handed, my chick," said the old woman—"left-handed, like all of us here; and yours the legacy."

"What legacy?" he asked.

With a quick movement the old woman turned and threw out her hand over the bubbling kettle. Instantly there rose from it a cloud of aromatic, intoxicating steam.

Into this the old woman peered for a moment or two with an expression of eager expectancy. Suddenly again she reached out, and this time it seemed that from the wraith of steam she plucked a coin.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*," she murmured. "Have you ever heard of it?"

"No."

"This is it."

She kissed it and passed it over to him. He saw that it was a dollar—an ordinary American dollar of early date, worn and shiny. It seemed to possess some other warmth than that

of its recent bath of steam. It made his fingers tingle. It sent throughout his entire being a feeling of *malaise*, almost of nausea.

He would have given it back. He could not. It clung to him, gripped him—that bit of minted silver—as though it were a frightful thing, the metallic heart of some invisible octopus, the signet of an invisible hand.

As he stared at it he saw that it also bore the emblem of the winged cross rudely graven on its surface. Signet indeed of an invisible hand—a hand that was gripping him.

"What is it?" he managed to articulate in strained tones.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*," the old woman repeated, speaking softly with a thrill of excitement. "That is your heritage, my chick—oh, a rare and wonderful heritage!"

She cackled with delight.

"What centuries are locked up in it," she went on. "He fled from Holland to Bohemia, did the first Frelinghuysen, before America was. He built his castle. The king was his friend. That was nothing."

She emphasized her statement by slowly wagging a crooked finger. Her small eyes were fixed, yet glowing still with excitement.

"That was nothing. The curse of his devil's pact was upon him. Since then it has pursued his line. The last count fled to America, even as the first count fled to Bohemia; but no man can flee his own shadow, my chick. Thou art the shadow. The dollar is thy legacy. Thine the power to carry on the curse—the curse of the Frelinghuysens—curse of the Frails."

"And if I refuse?"

"You can't refuse."

"I'm a man—I'm twenty-one."

The old woman laughed again—a derisive, fateful laugh.

"The world is full of men like you. And which will be the gallows-bird and which the bishop? The world is full of sapling-trees. And which will be the crosier and which the gibbet?"

[Ah, not for nothing have we reared you in idleness and luxury. But now the time has come. A young tree grew to become a gibbet. This is you, my chick."

Turga stood there palpitant, somewhat frightened, yet his fear dominated, overwhelmed, by a sense of fatality, of exalted helplessness. Upon him he felt the grip of the invisible. He knew that the old woman was speaking the truth.

The Turga of the past—the reckless, care-free youth—was a fading ghost. This present Turga was the reality, would remain so forever more. He swallowed, sought to get a grip on himself, tried to take a man's part in the situation. He tore his eyes away from those of the old woman, glanced at the shadowy faces of the circle.

"Who are these people?" he asked.

"They are the last of the Cave-Dwellers," the old woman answered. "Our work is done in the old country. Schloss Frelinghuysen will never see another Frelinghuysen or a Frail. Strangers are buying it. Soon it will burn. Peasants will sow and reap where the cruel counts held sway. We have followed where the last count led."

She laughed softly. The laugh was echoed with a ghostly sibilance by the people in the circle.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler* has become the dollar of the Frails. The curse is in it. You'll see. You'll see."

Before Turga could draw back or even suspect her purpose, she had seized his shoulders in her skinny hands, had brought her dreadful face to his, and kissed him.

Turga felt his senses reel. He was conscious that the entire assemblage had risen to its feet, that men and women were alike engaged in a mad saraband. There were shrieks of wild laughter and quick anger, of half articulate speech and song. But through it all there reached the center of his brain, steadily, insistently, the voice of the old woman.

She was calling him the chosen one, telling him that he was the ax in the hand of the woodchopper, that the creator of the Frelinghuysen name and fortune had borrowed from the world and had never paid back, that the world would reclaim its own, even as the earth had already reclaimed, long ago, its original toll of titled dust.

The noise, the confusion, the intoxicating fumes from the seething pot mounted to Turga's head.

How he left the place he hardly knew. He had a vague recollection afterward of going out the way he had come in, without Paulo there to help him, back through the mean streets until he happened upon his automobile.

At sight of him the chauffeur jumped down from his seat and opened the door of the limousine.

Turga sank back into the familiar seat and the motor throbbed into life. Was he also, he wondered, a mere machine, to be stilled or sped into action at the will of some higher power?

He strove to find himself, to recover something of the confidence and equipoise that had been so strong within him only a few hours before.

His hand touched the coin in his pocket, lingered there. Up from it—swift, subtle, omnipotent—sprang something that gripped him, held him fast, gave him that same feeling of exalted helplessness.

There reeled through his brain a vision of sinister power.

## CHAPTER V.

### SET TO MUSIC.

THEY rolled out of the section of deserted streets into the sudden light and activity of Fourteenth Street, then on up through the reassuring brilliance and movement of upper Broadway. Yet Turga felt strangely apart, almost as though he were alone in silence and darkness, and all these people and things he saw and heard were but the phantasmagoria of a disordered brain.

He thought wildly of making this solitude real, of going home, of locking himself into his bedroom—anywhere, anything to shut out this compelling, invisible specter.

With a hand that trembled slightly he seized the speaking-tube to give the order to the chauffeur.

Then he had one of the strangest experiences of his life.

It was his voice that spoke. But it was as though the will that formed the words were other than his own.

Home! Home! That was where he wanted to go; yet, very complacent, cool, with no trace of excitement, his voice was instructing the chauffeur to drive to the opera.

The man didn't understand immediately. Turga's heart was thumping. This time—this time—

While he was still resolving to resist, still striving to master the sort of terror which engulfed him, his voice, still dispassionate, repeated the order: "To the opera!"

Even there in the promenade of the crowded auditorium he felt strangely alone. All about him were the smooth backs and the sleek, well-nourished heads of men dressed as he was, yet they might have been so many spirits. Some one spoke to him, clapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

He murmured a reply, but he had not even noticed who it was. He heard the stormy clamor of the "Walküre," yet he seemed to be in the silence.

He had tried to go home. A superior power had forbade—that was the thing that kept beating through his brain. That was the thing which became the theme of the music—throbbing, thunderous, triumphant—and the wild messengers of *Wotan* were attendant upon him—him, Count Carlos Turga.

While he listened and mused—waited as a man waits for a pain or a delusion to wear itself away—he suddenly became conscious that his eyes, for the past several minutes, had been

directed and held to something outside his purpose, just as his voice had been when speaking to his chauffeur.

With a fresh quiver of an almost tragic interest, he recognized the object—or, rather, the objects—of his interest.

He was looking at a party in the box almost directly opposite—a fascinating woman of about forty or so, gorgeously appareled and begemmed; a girl of nineteen, slender and beautiful, and then a youth of his own age.

As he looked he saw the elder woman lift her *lorgnon* and scrutinize him with the lazy insolence of her kind, and through his heart there crept a feeling of dumb hatred. Into his face there crept a sullen flush, then faded again.

He looked at the girl—dark hair, gray eyes, exotic—and his hatred was modified by the world-old sense of masculine greed. She was very young, very beautiful, very desirable in every way.

Again his eyes shifted and rested on the youth. Surely the old dame of the warehouse had given him an easy task. The work of fate—the work to which that invisible hand and the cursed dollar in his pocket had doomed him—might not be so disagreeable and difficult, after all. For the first time that evening he felt a wave of almost good humor, almost of exultation.

Then, once again, he felt that inexplicable wave of dumb hatred, of a desire to work ill, to profit by the misfortune of these people at whom he was looking and who had been looking at him.

For they were Mrs. Frail—the former Princess Viatka—and her two children, Hugh and Agatha, all that was left of the fated line, and these were the ones that he was destined to destroy.

He must not let them suspect, he told himself. He tried to look away. He could not. A black cloud had closed in upon his field of vision.

The wild music of the "Walküre" still throbbed in his brain; but of all the

vast assemblage there he could see only those three—the fascinating Mrs. Frail, the girl at her side, the weak and self-indulgent face of the heir of all the Frail millions.

Once more Turga's hand came in contact with the coin of ill-omen the old woman had given him.

As he recognized the feel of it he saw Hugh Frail bow in his direction, then rise and leave his place.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GHOSTLY SOUVENIR.

THERE was something about young Count Carlos Turga that had always made a certain appeal to the somewhat jaded interest of the widow of the late Horace Frail. She had often seen the youth hovering about on various occasions—dances, garden-parties, horse-shows.

She had admired him. Every woman did that. No handsomer, better-mannered young man was imaginable, though the former Princess Viatka came from a part of the world where men are notoriously good-looking.

She was a Slav in the flower of her age—gray eyes and abundant dark hair sagaciously coifed, subtle, ardent, possessing a tremendous amount of what people call temperament, thirsty always for new sensations, yet never losing that almost Oriental fatalism which translated itself in terms of the most exquisite poise.

There was a delightful little flutter in her bosom now as she lifted her *lorgnon*. Perhaps it was that stormy "Walküre" music quite as much as it was the appearance of young Turga himself.

He appeared to be very tragic, very distraught. Perhaps he was in trouble. Into the somewhat tropical field of her imagination there sprang up some idea of consoling him.

He was certainly looking in their direction. It couldn't be Agatha who wholly absorbed his attention. She

knew all about the psychology of young men, and Agatha was very immature, not to say acidulous, and green.

Mrs. Frail reclined languidly back in her chair and touched her son on the arm with her fan. Hugh generally required some physical jolt to awaken him.

"Isn't that young Count Turga over there, dear?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "Just been looking at him. A bit thick, you know—his staring at Agatha like that."

"Let him stare," said Agatha by way of disguising any emotion she might have felt.

She was a slim, young thing, was Agatha, but there was that about her—just as there was about her mother—of the beautiful, dreamy, aristocratic Siberian tigress.

Still young, slightly acidulous and green perhaps, but quite self-sufficient, quite self-possessed and capable of managing her own affairs, was Agatha.

She also had dark hair and gray eyes, like her mother's; but her eyes were more responsive, more capable of fleeting changefulness.

"By the way," Mrs. Frail resumed, blissfully ignoring the animadversion of her son, "he could just complete a little party at supper."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"I was just going to beg off, mater."

"Indeed!"

"A couple of fellows at the club—really couldn't get out of it, you know."

Mrs. Frail stifled a yawn. She didn't care very much what Hugh did; this was her way of showing it.

"Then I must have Count Turga to take your place," she sighed with fine resignation.

"I'll try to catch the animal for you now," Hugh answered with something bordering on animation. One cocktail now would do him a world of good.

Turga wasn't surprised, a little later, when young Frail delivered himself of the invitation. It was almost

as though he had been expecting it. For the fraction of a second his dark eyes swept the young man in front of him, and there flashed through his heart and brain, like the tepid fire of old wine, an almost dreamlike sense of power.

The feeling was still strong within him as he entered the Frail box, brought the pink, beautifully manicured tips of the former Princess Viatka's fingers to his lips, and he enveloped, fleetingly, with his dark eyes the exceedingly graceful figure of Agatha Frail.

He hadn't desired the thing. It was fate that had brought him here. Had he had his own way he would even now be mooning the hours away in morose loneliness in his own bedroom. But the invisible guardian had decreed otherwise, had brought him into the presence of all that remained of the great family whose arbiter he was—youth, wealth, beauty.

There was still that quality of tragic solemnity in his deportment which had just now so deeply impressed the former Princess Viatka's impressionable nature.

But Turga was smiling in his heart.

The chant still cadenced through his brain—

—Behold, behold!

We take again what was never sold.

Throughout the remainder of the opera, and afterward, in the soft refulgence of the supper-table, with the cloyingly sweet music of a Hungarian band charging the atmosphere, Mrs. Frail was conscious that Turga's eyes were upon her.

The fact gave her quite an unusual and decidedly pleasant little thrill. She had never felt like that before when young men had looked at her. She had a presentiment of danger, illusive, haunting, ghostly. The music surged in upon them, swooning, voluptuous.

"They lack the fire of our Bohemian players," said Mrs. Frail, with a smile that called for more intimate speech.

Turga's eyes flashed. Again that undertone of pink suffused his cheeks.

"How did you know that I was Bohemian?" he asked.

"I know Bohemia well," she answered. "It was there that I lived for years after my marriage; you know, Mr. Frail had a place there. We still have it—a gloomy and terrible place; Schloss Frelinghuysen, in the Piesen Hills."

"And you're going back some time?"

The former Princess Viatka shrugged her exquisite shoulders.

"It was there that Mr. Frail died."

She flashed a pink and white smile in Turga's direction sufficient to indicate that her mourning was a thing of the remote past. But his somber eyes came back from Agatha, met hers, and compelled her to go on in spite of herself.

"A duel—a countryman of yours. Schloss Frelinghuysen always was haunted—family curse—all that sort of thing. That was why Count von Frelinghuysen, Mr. Frail's grandfather, came to this country and clipped his name."

"And left the curse behind him?"

Turga was smiling, but an inner excitement had quickened his pulse. Everything—everything—was adding realization to this ghostly world which that night had been uncovered to him.

Mrs. Frail affected a slight shudder—a little shrinking of her delicately carved throat and shoulders.

"I believe not," she answered. Her vibrant voice dropped still lower, came to him accompanied by a minor rhapsody from the orchestra. "It all came back to me to-night when I saw you looking so dreadfully tragic at the opera. They say that ghosts can't cross the water, you know; but, somehow—"

Without premeditation, Turga had drawn the marked dollar from his pocket and was idly toying with it on the table in front of him. At the sudden break of what Mrs. Frail had to



say he again glanced up at her. She was looking at the coin with a sort of passionate eagerness.

"What have you there? Where did you get it?" she whispered.

He held out the coin for her examination, and let his eyes drift over to Agatha; only dimly visible in the light of the shaded candelabra, she was manifesting her disapproval of her mother's monopoly by affecting an exaggerated indifference.

Mrs. Frail had taken the coin, was staring at it, fascinated.

"The *Frelinghuysen thaler*," she whispered. "The dollar of the Frails! The dollar Horace carried when he was killed in the duel. I knew it! I knew it!"

She lifted her eyes to Turga's. He was again looking at her. She passed the coin back to him. It was quite obvious that she was frightened—frightened but thoroughly happy, as is often the way with women like that.

"The ghost," she thrilled softly—"the ghost has crossed the water."

## CHAPTER VII.

### FOR HIGH STAKES.

It was late, but Turga had no desire for sleep. He had hurried back to his bachelor apartment, unhindered this time by the invisible hand which had rested upon him so heavily some time before.

Paulo was not there. For the first time within Turga's memory the aged servant was not where he should have been. It was but another incident in the chain of circumstances which Turga felt was binding him.

He telephoned to the lower hall. Paulo had not been seen since they had gone out together earlier in the evening. He called up the garage and interviewed the chauffeur. The man's memory of the night's events coincided wholly with his in every respect, so far as that was possible.

There was no trace of the cryptic

message which had served as a preliminary of the mystery. Paulo had evidently taken it with him.

He threw himself into an easy chair and tried to reflect. Had there been nothing else, it was remarkable enough the way he had been brought into contact with the Frails that night. Mrs. Frail had never been at such pains before to manifest any interest that she might have had in him.

He recalled again their moment of parting, when her fingers had lingered in his, when she had looked into his eyes with that strange expression of hers—a mingling of joy and fear and almost tragic anticipation—which he had first noticed when they were sitting together at the supper-table. It made him feel a little cruel, gave him once more that vision of sinister power.

Then the memory of the mother was blotted out by thought of that fairer, younger face and figure—Agatha, with Heaven knows what of volcanic fire smoldering under the gray ash of her inscrutable eyes.

And he, Count Carlos Turga, was the ax in the hand of the great wood-chopper, he the sapling-gibbet, he the ordained instrument of destruction!

Gradually, at thought of her, his excitement was tinged with something of remorse as well. It brought with it a resurgence of doubt and rebellion. After all, the thing was too absurd. He must have drunk too much. Mentally, he catalogued the events and libations of the afternoon.

But even as he reflected, some force outside of himself—that same strange extra-volition which he had already experienced—had started him again toward the elevator.

This time he did not resist. He knew that it would be futile to resist. He even argued with himself in a blind attempt to prove that he was doing what he wanted to do; that the cool air of the night would do him good; that contact with the material aspects of normal things would bring him back to normal comprehension.

But the night had gone foggy than ever—a night of infernal enchantment when nothing was natural. He walked on and on, moodily lighting cigarette after cigarette in an effort to regain some degree of calm.

Had he questioned himself, he would have admitted that there was only one place in town that he really cared to avoid—that was the Checker Club, the one club where he knew he would be pretty sure to encounter Hugh Frail. He had had quite enough excitement that night. He wished no more.

Yet, he was not altogether surprised when he lifted his eyes and found that he had come to the Checker Club's ample door.

For a moment he paused. He smiled a little, felt within himself an impulse to turn back. He translated this impulse into the form of a command which he sent along the telegraph system of his nerves. It was as though his will had not been—as though it had never been. He was like a swimmer powerless in the sweep of a great current.

His feet were carrying him through the club-house entrance.

It wasn't a very large club, but with a somewhat large reputation for the liberality of its house rules and the extent to which this liberality was utilized by its limited membership.

Even before Turga had crossed the entrance-hall he could hear the voice of young Hugh Frail lifted high in maudlin speech. The sound came to Turga as both promise and challenge. Was this, then, the appointed hour?

For a second or two he paused in the doorway. A smile was on his lips, a gleam of almost savage excitement, such as he himself had seen on other faces that night, came into his eyes. It had needed but a glance to see that the inmates of the billiard-room had been gambling—some primitive game of heads and tails.

Young Frail, his weak face flushed, was crowing some recent victory like a tipsy cock.

"I've got you all bluffed," he said, "You're pikers—all of you. I challenge the world."

"There's Turga," somebody said, "Try him."

Frail turned and looked at Turga unsteadily. For the second time that night their eyes met—the one sober, fateful, something about him of the watchful snake; the other muddled, arrogant, foolish.

"Heads or tails?" Frail cried. And he added the information: "I'm the champion of the world, Turga, old chap. Fair warning. Hate to take money from a child."

As he spoke he tossed a gold coin into the air as a demonstration of his claim and called heads. Heads it was.

He had advanced to that uncanny state of inebriety where some people are possessed of a sort of second sight. He again tossed the coin; again called the turn.

"For twenty dollars, what will it be?"

The coin shot, revolving, into the air—a slender thread of light.

"Heads," said Turga softly. He had drawn within himself. He was letting that other will do as it would.

"Heads it is!" cried several of the crowd with delight.

Into Frail's face had come a look of drunken stupefaction. What had happened struck him as incredible, unjust.

"Make it a hundred," he urged, bent on revenge.

Turga did not speak. He poised the coin he had just recovered on thumb and finger and sent it whirling upward. There had recurred to him that words of the old woman that he had come into his legacy—that marked silver coin. If she had meant by that that funds were no more to be sent to him as heretofore, it was high time that he be accumulating some money of his own. Year after year these funds had come to him. He had never asked whence or why.

"Heads," Frail murmured with less confidence than he had shown before,

The coin clinked down, rolled the length of the table, and toppled over on its side. A chorus of exclamations went up from the crowd. It was tails. Turga had won again.

Frail was furious. But he sought to cover his discomfiture with rude sportsmanship.

"I'm tired of this kid-play," he averred. "Listen, Turga; are you a sport? One more shot for"—he paused to give emphasis to what he was going to say—"for ten thousand dollars."

"Ah, cut it out, Hugh!" some one objected.

Turga glanced in that direction, saw a stout young man with broad shoulders and yellow hair—Frederic Graw 3d. They had never liked each other to any marked extent.

"I'm on," Turga said softly, with his eyes again on Frail. "I'm on for any amount you wish."

Frederic Graw 3d had taken Frail by the arm, was expostulating with him; but Frail was obdurate, shook himself free.

"For ten thousand—more if you want," he insisted.

"For ten thousand," said Turga softly.

His hand had sought the marked dollar in his pocket. At contact with it there had again crept up his arm and throughout his entire being a sense of fatality. He had nothing whatever to do with what was to follow. He was but the instrument in the grip of a greater power.

He had brought out the coin and placed it on the table in front of him. As in a dream, he heard his voice ask the question as to whether or not he should make the toss.

Graw had whispered something to Frail—a warning perhaps, for Hugh had been borrowing heavily of late—but Frail continued to disregard him. Graw turned to Turga. Had he spoken to a deaf man it would have been the same.

"You toss," Frail commanded, "I'll call the turn."

"For ten thousand dollars," Turga said, his voice barely above a whisper.

For a moment or so he stood there, holding up the coin, waiting, half-fearful, expectant, yet certain of what was to follow. Suddenly the muscles of his arm and hand twitched convulsively and the coin was in the air.

It had almost touched the table again before Frail spoke. All confidence had gone out of his voice. In spite of his effort to appear indifferent, there was no mistaking that tremulous huskiness.

"Heads!"

Turga did not even look to see whether he had won or lost. He knew—knew he had won even before he heard those there proclaim the fact.

Frail had leaned over and seized the marked dollar.

"Don't mind, do you, Turga?" he asked with sudden sobriety.

"Don't mind what?"

"Don't mind if I keep this dollar as a souvenir?"

"Of course not." He paused. "Why?"

Young Frail appeared to have recovered his sobriety. He gazed down at the coin for a while musingly.

"Coins like this have had a place in my family history," he said. "Maybe this one's haunted. I want to try the thing out."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE ZIGZAG ROAD.

A HIGH-POWERED roadster with a single occupant swerved into Broadway, just missing the curb.

Turga, standing alone on the corner, recognized Frail. His late adversary at the Checker Club was off for a spin. Those solitary "joy rides" of his were celebrated—his favorite wind-up for a night filled with other kinds of exhilaration.

Turga felt a little crisping of excitement. There went the "winged dollar."

There was something uncanny in that careening power, only half dominated by the tipsy youth—*Phaethon and the Chariot of the Sun*.

There was a parking-space for public automobiles but a few yards away. Before Frail's machine had traversed the distance of two city blocks—making an exaggerated curve round a vigilant policeman—Turga had stepped quickly forward, a nervous cranking-movement of one of his arms sufficient hint to the chauffeur of one of the largest machines. It happened to be an equal of Frail's machine in almost every respect—late the property of some private in New York's great army of ephemeral rich.

"Follow that machine," said Turga briefly.

The chauffeur wasted neither time nor words. He was a wise young man so familiar with the night-life of the city that he had ceased to wonder—or to ask explanations—when a fare was so obviously a commander of ready money.

Frail was already approaching Central Park. The chauffeur of Turga's machine slid discreetly past the policeman, then shot forward with a breath-taking burst of speed. Before two minutes had elapsed, the tail-light of the first machine had grown brighter.

Frail was evidently not out for speed—not yet. He was seeing how close he could come to various obstacles, moving and stationary, without touching them. It was a favorite sport of his.

Half through the park, he swung out into Central Park West and started south at a livelier clip. He was no longer toying with danger. He had apparently selected a destination and was making for it by the shortest route. They were just in time to meet a ferry for the Jersey shore.

Frail appeared to be perfectly happy. He was in evening dress, but he was bare-headed and sat hunched up in his driver's seat. He looked neither to right nor to left, nor behind him.

They climbed a long incline into the

smooth expanse of a deserted boulevard. There was a magnificent burst of speed for half a dozen miles or so, then Frail again began his fancy-work—swinging giddily from one side of the broad road to the other. Then he was off again like a shooting star.

Turga's chauffeur grinned, but spoke no word. Turga kept his eyes on the dim, red light.

Before him it wound in and out through the misty darkness, now faint, now clear, like the annunciator on some tally-board of fate.

Frail had left the boulevard, turned into a more dangerous road—narrower, darker, not so straight. Again he had stopped wavering, was again intent in getting from his machine its last shred of speed. There were risks enough.

They dropped dizzily down long descents, catapulted over hills, stormed like the night-wind through sleeping hamlets.

It had become a race. Turga's chauffeur had settled a little lower in his seat. This was something else than a noisy excursion round town. His mouth was finer drawn. The lines from nose to chin had deepened.

Five years had dropped from his life. He was back again in the heyday of road-racing—when he had the big chance, when he had come within just an ace of glory and fortune.

Turga long ago had cast hat and stick into the tonneau back of him. He was crouching in his seat at the chauffeur's side. The wind gripped his face like a cold, wet towel, blinding and stifling him.

Only occasionally now could he see the red spark that was luring them on—the fugitive curse of the winged dollar. And who could say where the curse would fall?

They unreeled swift, disordered miles of wood and open meadow. The Frail country-place lay far up on the Hudson. It was obvious that this was the destination. It couldn't be much farther now.

There was a shrill discordance in the

hurricane noise besetting them, a sudden slackening of speed. Turga lifted himself slightly. He was sore and cramped. He was suddenly conscious that for several minutes the fitful red spark that they had been chasing had disappeared.

They were in a heavily wooded country. As their speed slackened still more, a tremendous silence seemed to deluge in upon them from the frightened trees. For the first time the chauffeur spoke.

"Something's happened."

"An accident?"

"Nothing else."

Turga experienced a pang at his straining heart. It was the ultimate test. It was no nightmare.

He had heard a strange, old woman sing the doom of the Frails—in a warehouse with the Frail name on it, still redolent of the spirits that had contributed so much to the Frail fortune—and he had had his allotted share in the working out of fate.

In the great stillness that had fallen the machine crept forward then round a turn.

And by the light of their *phares* they saw the machine that they had been pursuing there, just ahead of them.

It was turned half round. It was crumpled down, broken, spent, like an exhausted runner.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BROWN COTTAGE, BLUE EYES.

THEY found him lying in a ditch at the side of the road a dozen yards farther on. There was a little blood on his face, but this might have come from a flying pebble during the run.

He was breathing. One of his arms was twisted beneath him. But so far as they could discover from their first, hasty, nervous examination, there was nothing to indicate that his injuries would be fatal. He was unconscious, but his pulse was strong. A tangle of

weeds and high grass had broken his fall.

"There's a house near here," said the chauffeur. "We'll get him to it."

"Where?"

"Get him into our machine. It can't be far."

They lifted him up as gently as possible. The twisted arm had been broken or dislocated; they didn't know which. Investigation just then would have done no good, anyway.

"I've got a little booze I keep for accidents," the chauffeur suggested hopefully.

"He's had enough as it is," Turga answered.

The chauffeur was right. Before they had traversed a quarter of a mile they came to a private driveway serpentine off among the trees through an opening in a low stone wall. Back from the road they made out the dim silhouette of a cottage.

The chauffeur got down from the machine and went in to investigate.

Turga, still in the machine, supporting the unconscious Frail, saw a yellow gleam of light, heard the barking of a dog, then voices. Again he touched Frail's pulse. He felt almost as though he had a share in murder.

The chauffeur came running back and clambered into his seat.

"We're lucky," he said. "The man who lives here is a doctor."

He swung the machine round and brought it daintily up the private driveway. Turga could see that they were in the precincts of one of those country homes which are found in the neighborhood of every great city—modest, yet luxurious in its perfect comfort, beautiful, exquisitely kept.

It was a large brown cottage, and even in the gray darkness of the October night there was a hint of scarlet oak and maple, of massed chrysanthemums and other autumn flowers. The air had a special fragrance—healing, aromatic, as though the master of the house had summoned nature to assist him in the practise of his art.



The front door was open. Turga saw a stout, rubicund old gentleman, with a mass of disorderly white hair, standing there to receive them. He helped them carry Frail through the hall and into a leather-furnished and book-lined study. There they placed him on a broad divan.

"The end of a night's frolic," said the chauffeur, in quest of something to say.

"And the beginning of a career," said the doctor gently enough.

"It's Mr. Frail."

Both Turga and the chauffeur turned.

A girl had entered, unheard until she spoke. She couldn't have been more than nineteen, but she appeared even younger—her heavy, pale, yellow hair hanging down her back in a single braid, her sloping shoulders delicate and almost childlike in the thin, light-blue kimono; a delicately chiseled face with a fine cheek-bone and a fine chin, and the softest, bluest eyes—so Turga thought—that man ever looked upon or that ever looked on man.

There was something at once fairy-like and maternal in this soft entrance of hers. She was perfectly modest, but not the least nervous.

"Gentlemen," said the physician, without interrupting his intent ministrations to his patient, "this is my daughter, Miss Carstairs. She generally helps me in affairs like this."

Miss Carstairs acknowledged this somewhat summary presentation with a brief glance, a bare nod. Her alert sympathy was otherwise engaged. Already she was assisting her father.

Frail opened his eyes.

"I came a cropper," he murmured.

His eyes met those of the girl leaning over him, and tarried there.

"And I've died," he continued, "and gone to heaven."

The doctor snorted, then delivered himself of a cheery little laugh.

"Not so bad as that," he said. "A dislocated shoulder, a broken collar-bone."

The girl helped him with steady hand; the doctor had stripped the injured shoulder. Turga, seeing that he could be of no assistance, and with a guilty desire to keep his presence unknown to Frail, had passed out into the hall, followed by the chauffeur. They heard Frail groan and expostulate as the doctor performed his painful service; then there was silence again.

Presently Miss Carstairs came out to where they were waiting.

"Mr. Frail is a neighbor of ours. He is in good hands," she added with a swift smile. "If you don't mind, I think that we had better keep him here for the night. He is rather unstrung—needs rest, you know."

The look of her blue eyes came back to Turga as he and the chauffeur drove back their lonely way to the city.

## CHAPTER X.

### HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL.

His surroundings were so wholly at variance with the way he felt that Hugh Frail groaned inwardly. His physical discomfort was sufficient, but the groan was intended to express his bitterness of spirit. He felt abominably unworthy, unspeakably unclean. Everywhere he looked was the impeccable chastity of pale blue and white.

His headache was bad enough, and a stabbing pain came from the region of his right shoulder when he attempted to move. But his remorse was worse than either of these things.

He wasn't yet quite sure where he was. He had but the haziest recollection of what had happened after losing far more than he could afford at the Checker Club. Then, by slow degrees, his flight by motor returned to him—that he had started out for his family's country-place at Cherry Hills, that some place along the road there had been an accident.

Then he remembered dimly, as one recalls the phantasmagoria of a dream,

the ministrations of the doctor, the vision of a soft-handed, blue-eyed girl.

It seemed to him that he had seen her before. He wondered where? Perhaps this was her room. It looked as though it might be. Again remorse and a sense of unworthiness submerged him.

There were blue-silk curtains at the French windows. The wall-paper was blue and white. So was the upholstery, as much as he could see of it. It all harmonized with the fragment of blue sky he could see through the white branches of a grove of beeches, thus accentuating the ethereal, unearthly quality of the place.

"If I ever," he reflected—"if I ever—"

He paused to meditate an oath sufficiently solemn to bind himself for the rest of his natural life, when there was a faint tapping at the door. Then the latch clicked. He watched in silence, half suspecting who the visitor would be, fearful lest she be frightened away before he could look at her.

He recognized her now—the daughter of Dr. Carstairs—though he had never spoken to her. From a distance he had even noticed that she was good-looking, but he had never suspected her of being so downright beautiful.

She noticed that his eyes were open, and her first expression of caution was dissolved in a smile of quick sympathy.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Wonderfully fine," he managed to say; but the look of undisguisable misery on his face gave him the lie.

Miss Carstairs had stepped forward with no more hesitancy than any trained nurse would have displayed and put a cool, smooth hand on his forehead. Young Frail closed his eyes and held his breath.

"A little fever," she said; "not much."

"Not when your hand's there," he told her.

"Katsenjammer!" she diagnosed.

"And repentance," he supplemented. "Will you ever forgive me?"

"It isn't I who have anything to forgive," she said.

"But it will help a lot—"

Her blue eyes were looking down upon him with fathomless serenity. Again there came in upon him painfully that feeling of wretched unworthiness that was so strong upon him when he first awoke. He had made a little effort at levity, but all levity went out of him. The sinner, dragging his soiled record to the footsteps of the throne, could have felt much more abased than he did.

Those blue eyes above him were like two transparent fragments of the blue sky.

"Gee," he broke out, with a self-surprising tremor in his voice, "but I do feel rotten!"

"Poor boy!"

Again that wonderfully cool, smooth hand resumed its place on his forehead. Again Frail closed his eyes, but this time with some vague idea of not embarrassing her when he said what he had to say.

"Not the way you mean," he explained. "You know, you look so altogether different from what I know I am."

He paused. There was no fluctuation of the hand on his forehead. He kept his eyes closed. He didn't have to look to know that Miss Carstairs understood.

"We've sent Uncle Jerry, our gardener, over to your place for some clothes," she said soberly. "As soon as he comes back he'll help you bathe and dress. Shall I bring you your breakfast now?"

"I could wash my own face," said Frail.

He demonstrated the possibility by moving his left hand over his face in an imaginary ablution. Without premeditation his hand came into contact with hers. It startled him so that for a moment he left it there—just barely touching it.

Had the contact been electrical, the thrill of it couldn't have been more

real. Miss Carstairs made no move to draw her hand away.

"I'm a trained nurse," she said with an excited little laugh like a child proposing a new game. "I can help you—I really can."

With spontaneous enthusiasm for her self-imposed task, she had given his hand a tiny squeeze and was out of the room before he could object. When she appeared again, she had donned a long, white apron, had surmounted her fluffy yellow hair with a linen nurse's cap.

She carried a bowl of water. There was a towel over her arm. She tried to look very serious and dignified, but her blue eyes were sparkling and there was a little flush of excitement in her cheeks that hadn't been there before.

"You're my first regular patient," she said, "though I have helped."

She took the business with the utmost seriousness, although she could not quite keep from smiling.

Frail surrendered himself utterly. He was willing now to imagine himself even sicker than he was. He groaned.

"I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to get away from here for a long time."

"Oh, wouldn't it be lovely!"

"I'd let you practise on me so much!"

This time it wasn't mere excitement that flushed Miss Carstairs's beautifully smooth cheek.

"You mustn't speak," she said, with the air of one who recalls a lesson from a text-book. "The patient should avoid excitement."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FRELINGHUYSEN "THALER."

MRS. FRAIL had a little thrill of satisfaction as she looked at herself in the long mirror. And well she might. The gorgeously embroidered mandarin-coat of Chinese-red made her positively superb.

Ordinarily, eleven o'clock in the morning was an hour of the day when she didn't care to be seen. But this time she regretted that her visitor was somewhat aged and, so far as she could remember, not at all the type to be influenced by feminine loveliness.

Her dark hair was coiled about her small head in a single opulent braid. The cloudy darkness of it made her face very striking, with its dark brows and dark-fringed gray eyes. By some legerdemain known only to her maid and herself she had brought her lips to match perfectly the color of her Oriental robe—an alluring red stain harmonizing face and costume in a way which would have delighted an artist.

She was a native of Southern Russia. She was still the Princess Viatka. Ah, *Dieu*, if she were only a girl again!

Gray, austere, spectacled and bearded, the typical European lawyer of the old school, Dr. Melnik couldn't suppress a little gasp of delighted astonishment at sight of her—thus rendering his welcome certain. It wasn't the first time that she had made men gasp like that, but coming from Dr. Melnik it was doubly welcome.

He had leaped to his feet with almost boyish impetuosity, had bent over her hand like a young courtier.

"This is indeed a most pleasant surprise," she said in her softest Russian. "How is everything in our beloved land?"

Dr. Melnik's Russian was not so soft. He spoke with a sort of guttural, forceful hesitancy. It was as though the Princess Viatka's gray eyes, mandarin-coat and lips to match had somewhat dazed him. Yet he was a man incapable of circumlocution.

"If you speak of Russia, I know not," he answered. "If you speak of Bohemia, more particularly of the Frelinghuysen estate, I must answer, not altogether good."

"And you've come all the way across the ocean to bring bad news?"

"Not precisely."

"Yet not for the mere pleasure of—"

She completed her sentence with a provoking smile and a toss of her beautifully coifed head.

Dr. Melnik delivered himself of a slight gesture of negation. "Alas, that would be strange enough; but my errand is stranger still."

"I am very interested."

"With your marriage into the Frelinghuysen line, *altesse*, you assumed something more than a share in the name and fortune."

"Even under the name of Frail?"

"When the last Count von Frelinghuysen thought that he could escape the historic curse of his line by changing his name to Frail, thought that he could leave the curse behind him by coming to America, he was desperate; he grasped at a straw."

"But he prospered."

Mrs. Frail shrugged her shoulders slightly, cast a glance at the damask-silk interior.

"Prosperity is not merely wine and silk. Surely, no man ever lived a life more a curse. I need not remind you of the story of his life—of their children and grandchildren—nor of the late Mr. Horace Frail, your honored husband."

"I know the story of the family curse. I know that most of the family have a penchant for tragedy, insanity, genius, suicide—oh, what you will—"

"And the Frelinghuysen *thaler*!"

There was no affectation, this time, in Mrs. Frail's start of surprise, her shudder of frightened recollection.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*! I remember—Horace had a marked dollar in his possession when he fell in the duel. And now—tell me. What do you know about it?"

Melnik delivered himself of a gesture of self-absolution—the gesture of a serious man who permits himself to speak of a subject which he does not understand and which might be absurd.

"The family archives mention it as far back as the sixteenth century, when there were no other *thalers* in Europe—only those *Joachims-thalers* of our Bohemia, and the first count, a fugitive from Holland, was master of the mint. God knows what thing he did—something so horrible, in any case, that it was never set down in writing. But then it was that we find our first reference to the curse—stamped into one of the original *thalers*."

"And the coin?"

"Ah, naturally, the original coin has long since disappeared. Would that this were also true of the legendary curse. It appears again and again—not in a *Joachims-thaler* but always somehow in a similar coin. As you say, when your honored husband fell, he had in his possession—But, why do you tremble?"

"An American dollar, curiously marked!"

"Precisely."

"I have seen it—or one just like it."

"Where? Not in the possession of—"

"Of a young man—also a Bohemian, young and noble—Count Carlos Turga."

"Turga—Turga—" Dr. Melnik sought to place the name. "Whence comes he?"

"Oddly enough, from the same district as that of Schloss Frelinghuysen—the mountains just to the north. So he has been told. He knows practically nothing of his family. He was brought up and educated here in America."

Dr. Melnik let his bearded chin rest on the bosom of his shirt. He twirled his thumbs one around the other and reflected.

"A friend of the family?" he asked.

"Almost."

Mrs. Frail, even now, could not resist letting her thought dwell, butterfly-fashion, for just a moment on the

way that the young count had looked at her the night before.

"Beware of him," said Dr. Melnik, with unrelieved austerity. "These mountain-folk are a dangerous lot for the Frelinghuysen line. I do not mind telling you, princess, that your estates in Bohemia failed to realize all the money we had hoped for. All the bidders—and there were few enough of them, Heaven knows—acted as though they had been touched by the blight—cautious, penurious, mean—almost as though they had been warned that they were dealing with a dangerous property."

Dr. Melnik laughed a hoarse, unhumorous laugh. He was speaking of a painful subject.

"This it was, largely, that brought me to New York—that and something else. A certain famous—or infamous, I know not which—sorceress of the mountain-tribe recently left the district of Frelinghuysen and came to America. And now, you speak of the marked dollar.

"I know I'm a fool—an old fool. But, you know, I've lived so long in the archives of the Frelinghuysens—I've seen so much of the tragedy of the Frails—that you can hardly blame me. Let me suggest, at any rate, that we keep this Turga at arm's length. Keep the dollar out of the family."

They smiled at each other—she thinking of the handsome Turga, perhaps, and he of the tragic destiny of the line represented by the woman in Chinese red, when Mrs. Frail's maid, Gabrielle, came in, paused, fluttering, with her hand on her heart—everything about her heralding bad news of some sort.

"Speak! What is it?" Mrs. Frail exclaimed, leaning forward with sudden agitation.

Gabrielle essayed English, out of deference for the presence of the stranger.

"Ah, madame," she exclaimed, "there is a accident of automobile. M. Hugh, he is *écrasé*."

"Not dead!"

"*Non, non; mais—*"

Chivvers, the butler, appeared with a card on a silver tray. He also showed traces of excitement. It was evident that he had heard the news. But he was a bringer of information as well.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," he said, "but the young gentleman says that he has seen Mr. Hugh, and he says, ma'am, that Mr. Hugh was not so badly hurt; that it isn't much, ma'am, and that he would be happy to reassure you."

Melnik had been as spectator, solemn, open mouthed. Here was additional evidence, indeed, that one of the reasons that had inspired his trip across the Atlantic was not all tragic nonsense.

Mrs. Frail had taken the card and scanned it, then held it out to Melnik with a frightened smile.

"This is delicious," she said, with an affectation of gaiety, "delicious or terrible."

Melnik took the card and frowned down at it in silence.

It bore the name of Count Carlos Turga.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SPELLS AND CHARM.

THERE was a good deal of the castle about the town house of the Frails. The Frelinghuysen fugitive who had built it had brought with him from the old country a good deal of the old country's futile ideas of architecture.

There was a dry moat instead of an areaway. The entrance-hall was an imposing place of carved sandstone and marble, its baronial aspect augmented by its trophies of flags and arms and suits of armor. The only light that entered it came from a wide, low, Gothic window at the first landing of the grand staircase.

It was the first time that Turga had ever been there. He looked about him



with a curious mingling of unrest and elation.

He was familiar enough with the homes of the mighty. He had been in many a hall as handsome as this. But never before had he felt that such a place was in any way intimately associated with his own destiny.

He had hardly ever even thought of marriage; but he thought of it now—thought of it with a quickening of the pulse.

As if in answer to some unspoken petition in his heart, there appeared just then, against the opalescent glow of the Gothic window, the slight and graceful silhouette of Agatha Frail. She was dressed for the street in gray and black—the dove gray of her eyes, the blue black of her hair.

Turga started forward with a half-stifled exclamation of pleasure, then checked himself. But Miss Frail had noticed him and swung over in his direction with her hand out. She noticed the quick wave of color that came, girl-like, to his cheeks, and gave it a correct interpretation. He had been thinking about her.

It was very romantic. Several times on the preceding evening their eyes had met. Some sort of a mutual understanding had already sprung up between them.

A footman was already at the door ready to open it for her. But she turned back. She and Turga strolled side by side down the cloisteral length and shadows of the hall.

"You've come to see mama?" said Agatha. "She'll keep you waiting. She always does—and I believe somebody else is here to see her, anyway."

The butler returned.

"Mrs. Frail will be pleased to see you, sir," he said.

"Very well, Chivvers," Agatha answered on Turga's behalf. "As I was saying—oh, as I was saying—"

Her voice trailed off into nothing.

The dutiful Chivvers was again out of ear-shot.

"You are looking wonderful this

morning," said Turga, with a slight quickening of his pulse.

Miss Frail was very close to him.

"Do you tell every one that?"

"Not so truthfully," he answered with conviction.

"You weren't a bit nice last night," she accused him.

"I had stage-fright—your fault."

"Why did you look at me like that?"

Not only Turga's pulse but also his respiration had quickened.

"I couldn't help it," he said in a stifled whisper.

It must have been some feminine version of the old adage that every man is a king in his own house. Miss Frail was feeling very bold and reckless. They had come to the end of the hall—a grottolike recess under one of the flying archways of the stairs.

She instinctively knew that they were out of sight of Chivvers and his cohorts. There she paused and faced Turga, her inscrutable gray eyes looking up into his luminous dark ones.

"I couldn't help it," he breathed in an almost inaudible whisper.

There was something in the twilight that shut them in—that recalled the chimera of the previous evening—an experience which even now, vivid as his memory of it was, he was half inclined to repudiate as a nightmare. But there was no doubt of that conviction in his heart that he was master here; that he was the arbiter of the destinies of this girl who stood before him, of her mother and her brother.

He also knew that they were out of sight of indiscreet eyes; that the girl herself had led him here.

With a quick gesture he had placed his hands on her shoulders.

He felt the tremor of her slight body, but she did not recoil. He kissed her on one of her closed eyes. A moment later they were strolling back into the hall as though, nothing had happened, perfectly calm, perfectly circumspect—so far as all outward

appearances were concerned, at any rate.

The dutiful Chivvers was approaching. Said he:

"Mrs. Frail will be pleased to receive you now, sir."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### ONE FLIGHT UP.

FOR reasons best known to herself, Mrs. Frail had decided to dispense with the proffered presence and advice of the austere Dr. Melnik in the forthcoming interview. She had taken another look at herself in the mirror; had decided that she was quite capable of taking care of herself in any combat where her antagonist would be so susceptible a person as the young Count Carlos Turga.

Her Chinese red mandarin-coat, with lips to match, was, after all, mightier than much wisdom of a mere intellectual sort.

Half-way up the grand staircase Turga met the severe-looking gentleman of the beard and spectacles. They were just under the Gothic window. Some trick of the light coming through it, distorted by the leads and the colored glass, may have exaggerated the lawyer's expression. A purple stain lay across his frowning brow. A red stain covered the rest of his face. Then the apparition smiled—a diabolical sort of smile.

They had bowed to each other, after the manner of Europe when well-bred persons pass each other on the stairs.

There was occasion for Dr. Melnik's smile. He had had a glimpse of a handsome, dark-eyed youth in the full flush of health; had seen him pass a zone of light that had given his face the livid green of death, then almost instantly the scarlet of eternal fires.

He was of imaginative stock, sprung from a visionary race. The momentary symbolism of the changing light had pleased him immensely.

Mrs. Frail was still under the domi-

nation of emotion when Turga was ushered in. He embraced her in a sweeping glance full of sympathy; had brought her fingers to his lips—and held them there for the fraction of a second longer than the ordinary social protocol required.

"Dear boy—you bring me news?"

"Alas! of a kind. But it isn't serious."

"So they just told me; but I was so afraid that you were merely trying to allay my anxiety."

"He is in good hands. That he isn't badly hurt I know. I was taking a spin through the country last night—after leaving you"—Turga's eyes rested on hers for a moment in a way that said that she might have been the cause of his riding far out into the country like that in the middle of the night—"and I was lucky enough to be there just after the accident. A doctor was on the spot. Really, Hugh couldn't have chosen a better place, especially as the doctor had a good-looking daughter. Dislocated arm, a broken collar-bone; nothing worse than any one might get following hounds or on the polo-field.

"You're a dear," sighed Mrs. Frail. "I was so alarmed!"

Her red lips trembled. Her gray eyes were touched with self-pity and dawning relief. Turga reached forward and took her hands in his.

"I have my motor at the door. The morning is so fine! I'd love—"

Again he completed the half-spoken sentence with a look.

As Turga had said, the day was fine. The November sun had come up and driven away the mists and cloud of the night just passed. Only the blue haze of Indian summer hung over the far places. The air was fragrant, crisp, and exhilarating, the crimson and russet trees were atremble in the sunlight.

There was that about the day which meant not only the mystery of life, but the zest of it as well.

Any maternal anxiety which the

former Princess Viatka may have felt concerning the state of her offspring had long since disappeared.

The chauffeur, being a student of human nature as well as a respecter of speed-laws when he had a lady aboard, was bowling along at only comfortable speed. The two passengers on the rear seat had ample opportunity to compare notes.

It was Uncle Jerry, the Carstairses' gardener, who received them at the gate of the brown cottage. He imparted the cheerful information that nobody was home. The doctor was off for his regular walk through the woods. Miss Carstairs herself had driven the patient of the night before over to the adjoining Frail estate.

"If you drive right smart you might catch up with them," said Uncle Jerry.

"What consideration!" Mrs. Frail sighed.

"Just that," Turga replied, with a laugh. "Now, if we were only forced to follow them on to Poughkeepsie!"

Mrs. Frail looked her gratitude.

The precocious warmth of their friendship had steadily increased.

"We'll have our revenge," she said lightly. "Have you any other engagement? You could stay out here for luncheon. We could make a day of it," she said, with mounting enthusiasm.

"Watch me break all other engagements," Turga replied.

Quite unconsciously his hand was again resting on hers. Quite as unconsciously she was leaving it there.

Turga's thoughts again reverted for the hundredth time to the encounter with Agatha Frail in the hallway of the Frail town house that morning. Again Mrs. Frail's thought reverted to the morning call of Dr. Melnik.

It was very stupid of Dr. Melnik to think that a warning was even necessary. Turga was so manifestly ready to put himself entirely in her power.

In a very leisurely way the motor was treading through a more

than usually beautiful section of road, heavily wooded on both sides and fringed with rock and laurel. It was almost primitive, except that on one side—for mile after mile, it seemed—there appeared through occasional openings in the screening shrubbery the spear-headed pickets of a high iron fence.

"Cherry Hills," said Mrs. Frail, with her eyes on the fence. "Horace's grandfather would have his deer-park."

"Is the place open?"

"Unfortunately," Mrs. Frail replied.

She had thrown him an amused glance from the corner of her eyes. She saw the girl-like tinge of color that crept into Turga's smooth cheek, and she gave a slight pressure to the hand resting against hers before indulging in the fiction of arranging a lock of hair.

"I forget just how many people there are on the place all the year round," she continued. "Some frightful number—seven or eight hundred, not including the children and old people. It's the only form of charity the Frails have ever been noted for," she concluded, with a little laugh.

They came to a monumental gate of granite and wrought iron, with a porter's lodge of generous dimensions and sober architecture. A stout, rather flabby retainer appeared with the expression of a tired business man. He had already been forced to open the gate once that morning.

But, at sight of the woman in the automobile his expression of bored weariness gave way at once to one of anxious zeal. The gate swung open.

They had entered a beautifully kept avenue that swept away ahead of them in graceful curves. The tall trees arched their multicolored branches overhead. The dark, shining green of cedar and rhododendron made each side of the road a frontier of alluring and unexplored mystery.

There is a sort of intoxication in the physical presence of great wealth combined with great beauty, especially when these things take the form of a noble park.

At Turga's side was the mistress of this place. She was sitting so close to him that he could feel the tepid vibrance of her body. She hadn't resisted when he held her hand.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

Turga flashed upon her a dazzling smile. He leaned very close to her.

"I take you," he said softly; "but I'll have to whisper them."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE GATE OPENS AGAIN.

FEELING just as though she had had an early morning cocktail, Agatha Frail turned into the avenue with a light step and a sparkling eye. Generally she looked on this affair of the morning constitutional as more or less of a bore.

But it was at least useful in killing a part of the day, and it always held out a certain promise of adventure.

She had received an abundant heritage of romanticism from both father and mother. She had often thought of running away. She wasn't sure in her mind that she wouldn't do it yet.

Her habitual mood was that of a young eaglet just fledged, with all the instincts of soaring flight, yet hemmed in by gilded bars.

She had just reached the age when she could give a certain weight to her declarations of independence so far as tutors and dressmakers were concerned, but was still far from the greater liberty of a last year's debutante.

The day had auspiciously begun. There was adventure in the air. She had some vague idea of perhaps encountering young Count Turga again, after his interview with her mother—whatever that might be for. She had

seen his motor at the door. She could imagine a glorious elopement, a thrilling dash into the unknown, with pieces in the paper, and everything like that.

She was brought back to earth again by a cheery hail. A rather stout young man with broad shoulders and yellow hair had overhauled her—Frederic Graw, 3rd.

"I say, Agatha," he said cheerily as he swung into step at her side, "how the deuce do you expect a fellow to get to work when you put obstacles like this into the road?"

Agatha's first impulse was one of impatience, but his good nature dominated her.

"Are you really trying to work, Freddy?" she asked.

"Got in three whole days last week," he asserted with righteous dignity. "The governor's having a new sign painted—'Graw & Graw, Brokers.' Looks great."

"Won't he scold you if you're late?"

"Feeling a bit seedy—can't work if I'm sick," he smiled down at her. "By Jove, I'm a brute! Did you hear about Hugh?"

Agatha hadn't heard; and when she did hear, what interested her most was the fact that the original disseminator of the news was Count Carlos Turga.

It gave her a little thrill of pleasure that Turga could have seen her and talked to her—and made love to her—without having experienced the necessity of even mentioning the fact. She was a good deal of the Slav, was Agatha.

"And we could run out there in no time," said Graw, breaking in on her reverie.

"I hate sick-rooms," Agatha retorted—"dismal, smelly, subdued voices, and all that sort of thing."

"We wouldn't have to stay long," Frederic argued. "It isn't any of this sad business, you know. Great day for a run—bracing air, woods, good roads. And I have the greatest little old machine—new one, just got it. Only

thing it lacks, you know, is that you haven't ridden in it—hasn't been christened, or haloed, or whatever they call it."

"I—won't—go," said Agatha decisively.

Freddy's exuberance was beginning to get on her nerves. He was by way of spoiling everything that the morning had promised by way of romance and adventure.

She and Graw had grown up together. For her he held out nothing of these things. She knew him too well. He was too healthy.

"By Jove, Agatha," he said, undismayed, "you look positively stunning when you snap your snow-white teeth like that. I feel like the fellow in a cage with a panther or a tigress, or something like that."

"A cat!"

At that he had paid her the only kind of a compliment that she cared for.

"A bit cattish," he cajoled. Then, with a change of intonation: "Come on; it'll do you good."

They strolled along together a considerable distance, stopping now and then to look into shop-windows like a couple of children. Graw was hanging on with good-natured persistence. He had even confronted the terror of a milliner's shop, while Agatha haggled abominably over some trifle or other.

She had quite despaired of getting rid of him by fair means, and was trying foul.

Again they were out on the avenue. If Graw would only go!

If Turga would only come along!

The traffic-policeman at Thirty-Fourth Street lifted his hand as a signal for the cross-town cars to pass. In the quick congestion of motor-cars and other vehicles in the avenue on the upper side of the street Agatha caught a glimpse of some one—of two people—whom she recognized.

They were sitting together in an automobile; were so absorbed in their

conversation that they did not appear to care about anything else at all, least of all who might be looking at them from the sidewalk.

It was Count Turga and her mother.

After that first glance of hers Agatha looked straight ahead and quickened her pace.

Graw had noticed nothing in particular. There was only one person on the crowded avenue whom he could see anyway.

"I say, Agatha," he was saying, "we'll lunch together, then do a matinee."

Her answer was a deluge of delight.

"I've changed my mind," she said without so much as looking at him. "Get your car. We'll go out to Cherry Hills."

## CHAPTER XV.

### A FACE IN THE CROWD.

YOUNG Frail had negotiated a change of raiment. They found him reclining in a long chair of woven grass on the Cherry Hills terrace. He had succeeded in keeping Miss Carstairs in attendance, and his greeting of Turga and his mother was not particularly exuberant.

Miss Carstairs was plainly embarrassed, though Mrs. Frail hailed her as the preserver of her son's life. Mrs. Frail belonged to that category of women who encouraged romance. By some devious psychology she took the presence of a pretty girl at her son's side as a compliment to herself.

She even glanced discreetly in another direction as Miss Carstairs bade Hugh good-by and assured him that her father would drive over in the afternoon to see that he was getting along all right.

To Turga fell the acceptable task of accompanying the visitor to her waiting phaeton. Miss Carstairs's hand had felt so slim and cool, so smooth



and pleasant, in his a little while before, when he greeted her, that the memory of it lingered.

It had been like the touch of a soothing lotion to a fever patient. And as he walked at her side now along the balustraded terrace which was one of the features of Cherry Hills, he knew that her hand symbolized her whole nature—in a way not generally taken into consideration by professional palmists.

Miss Carstairs was just a bit disconcerted. For years she and her father had lived under the shadow of the great Frail estate; but by no possible stretch of imagination had the Frails and Carstairs been neighbors. But, like most young girls, her fancy had been captured by the Frail tradition—there was so much of splendor and mystery in it, of magnificence and tragedy.

The builder of the French château, which was the center of the Cherry Hills estate—the terrace of which she had just left—had left behind him a legend resembling that of *Blue Beard*.

He was a very terrible man, this fugitive Count von Frelinghuysen, and terrible he had remained even as the plain Mr. Frail; terrible even when for year after year he no longer appeared driving his fiery black team and it became known that he was glooming his life away in a corner of his palace, the victim of some nameless malady. There had been several ladies in the household, according to all accounts, but they had disappeared even more completely.

Then there was the tragedy of the Frail children. There had been an eldest son, heir not only to the name and fortunes of the Frails in America, but to a share of the historic Frelinghuysen lands in Bohemia. They had found him smothered in the family safety-deposit vault—so tradition had it—with a single coin clasped in his dead hand—a silver dollar peculiarly marked.

There had also been a daughter, but

she had disappeared—no one knew where.

The only remaining child was Horace, a profligate—according to all reports—whose folly had exiled him early from America. He it was who had married the Princess Viatka, had reached the climax of his career with a dueling-sword through his heart.

And now, for the first time in her life, Miss Carstairs had spoken to a Frail; had stood on the legendary terrace; had been kissed by the more or less fabulous Mrs. Frail, the former Princess Viatka. She had found them human. They had treated her as an equal—had insisted that she come to see them often, and her father was to continue his ministrations to the Frail heir.

A groom, with immobile patience, was holding the Carstairs pony.

"Let's walk a little way," Turga suggested. "Don't leave me all alone. We must give mother and son a chance to talk it over in private. I can't go back right away."

Miss Carstairs was tempted. Before them lay a sunken garden still tremulous with perfumed color, despite the lateness of the season. Both she and Turga knew that the entrance-road skirted the farther end of it. She looked at the garden, then back at Turga and smiled. He needed no other authority, but instructed the groom to drive ahead and wait for them.

"I should really be hurrying home," she said.

"While the rose blows along the river brink," Turga quoted.

Again she flashed on him her blue-eyed smile. "'With old Khayyam the ruby vintage drink,'" she supplemented. "A bad preceptor."

"An excellent one—with 'thou' and a day like this."

She tossed her head slightly; but Turga, watching her from the corner of his eyes, could see that she was not displeased. She seemed to be marvelously in her element—here in the cool sweetness of the garden—and he told

her so, then watched the heightened color, the flash of her eye, with a sense of perfect luxury.

It seemed to him an abominable thing that she should already have passed so much time in the company of Hugh Frail. He wondered what had passed between them. But when he questioned her in a half-jocular, half-suggestive way, which most girls would have accepted as a mere challenge to repartee, Miss Carstairs answered him with such frank innocence that he was disarmed.

As Agatha Frail, with Frederic Graw, 3d, at her side proudly demonstrating the suppleness of his new car, spun past the sunken garden, she caught a glimpse of Turga bending over a chrysanthemum with his head very close to that of a woman. At first she thought the woman was her mother. Then she noticed that this particular person had yellow hair. She bit her lip. Then the car was out of sight.

Turga received such an impression of having been looked at that he had turned almost instantly. But he was just too late.

He heard the receding, whispering rush of the motor that had just passed. He wondered who could have been in it. He was very susceptible to impressions. He was still looking, still absorbed in his new train of thought, although Miss Carstairs's soft voice continued to caress his ears, when a group of laborers—a full score of them—passed along the road in the wake of the automobile. Turga started slightly.

There was a face in the crowd that recalled his fantastic adventure in the old warehouse—the face of one who had surely been there.

The man threw a single glance in his direction—cruel, alert, savagely content—then trudged on his way with the stolid company.

"You look," said Miss Carstairs, "as though you had seen a ghost."

Said Turga: "I have."

"This place is full of them," she added softly, then bit her lip. She held out her hand. "There's the pony. I mustn't keep you any longer."

"Do you know how to lay ghosts?" he asked, clinging to her cool fingers.

She started to speak, then checked herself. Hugh Frail had asked her that same question but half an hour before.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ALL IN THE FAMILY.

THEY were all on the terrace when Turga returned from his pleasant errand to the sunken garden—not only Hugh and Mrs. Frail, but Graw and Agatha. Graw saluted him coldly enough, so Turga thought, but the momentary twinge of unpleasantness was instantly obliterated by the smile that the former Princess Viatka gave him, by the thinly disguised pleasure that Agatha evidently experienced at seeing him again.

It really mattered very little what Graw might think of him—or Hugh Frail either, for that matter—as long as he was *persona grata* to the châteline and her alluring daughter. Turga was perfectly at ease.

Agatha had come forward to meet him, had held out her hand—a sort of delicate white lie meaning to indicate that they had not previously met that morning.

"Now that you have lost one guide," she said, "I volunteer to take her place." She turned to her mother. "Luncheon won't be ready for half an hour yet, will it, mother dear? I'm going to show Count Turga about the place—some of grandfather's Bohemian things."

Agatha was not lacking in audacity. Almost before any one had had time to object, Agatha was bearing him off, a perfectly willing captive. Graw had taken a step in their direction, as if to follow; had recognized the hopelessness of it; had subsided as grace-

fully as possible into the company of Hugh and his mother.

"Something of a bounder, all the same," Graw murmured, with his eyes on the Princess Viatka.

"Why, Freddy dear!"

The former Princess Viatka had shrugged her shoulder in negation. If she felt any resentment at Agatha's venture in piracy she did not show it. After all, she found the situation just a bit amusing, especially in view of Graw's ill-nature.

"And you'll have to admit," she went on, "that he's awfully handsome."

"Oh, he's pretty enough!" Graw conceded; "but that doesn't mean that he's not a bounder. After what he did last night—"

"What did he do last night?" Mrs. Frail wanted to know. The conversation had lagged until then.

Graw looked at Frail.

"Go on and tell her," counseled the invalid. "Better now while she is sorry for me. She'll have to dig up, anyway."

He looked up at his mother with a rueful smile.

"More gambling debts?" queried Mrs. Frail with the ready intuition of long experience.

"It was Turga's fault," Graw explained. "Hugh was ahead and everything was lovely, when this Turga person came along and egged him on."

"How much was it this time?" asked the princess softly.

"A trifle of ten thousand."

Mrs. Frail caught her breath. It wasn't altogether the money loss that made her do it—she was thinking of what Melnik had told her that morning, of all the sinister memories which Turga himself had stirred in the back of her brain the evening before.

"And Turga won it?"

"By gad, *mater!*" Graw exclaimed. "I'm glad you take it like that. I really am. But, really, one would think you were glad that Turga won."

"Hush, Hugh; don't make yourself

out to be a worse fool than you are." She turned to Graw. "Tell me about it. Give me the details."

"Oh, come now, *mater*," young Frail protested. "Don't make poor Freddy be the goat. I'll admit that I was a bit tipsy—not in the least soused, or anything like that. No, really you couldn't blame Turga for that, Freddy, old man. But he did put the jinx on me, mother dear—oh, a regular jinx, you know."

He began to fumble awkwardly in his pocket with his one free hand. The former Princess Viatka did not speak. She was watching him with tense expectancy. She had moments of really remarkable prescience.

"You see," young Frail was rambling on, "everything was going so lovely until Turga pulled this bally dollar on me. I swiped it from him. Did you ever see the like?"

He held it up—that worn and shiny coin with the winged cross graved roughly on its face.

"Haunted!" young Frail exclaimed, with some primitive instinct for humor. "Jinx! Ah, you know; blessed if it doesn't feel a bit queer to the touch even now. I noticed the same thing last night."

"For the Lord's sake, Hugh, talk sense!" Graw mumbled.

As a matter of fact, there was something so uncanny about this youth sitting there after his recent misfortunes, here on the ancestral terrace which had been the scene of far greater misfortunes in the past—something so uncanny in his reference to the haunted coin—that Graw had felt a qualm of uneasiness.

"I am talking sense," Hugh retorted with lazy insistence. "I'm a Frail. Didn't you ever hear of the dollar—the dollar?"

The former Princess Viatka had stood somewhat tense, yet somewhat withdrawn, her eyes on the coin, yet hardly listening to what was being said. She was listening instead to the hundred whispers of the past, remote

and recent, which had to do with a coin like this—with this selfsame coin she had no doubt. Very calmly she reached over and took it.

"I'll keep this," she said softly. "I'll pay your debt this time, but I can't risk your getting in so deep another time."

"A fair exchange," laughed Graw.

"You're a brick, *mater*," said Hugh. "If I weren't wounded I'd slip you a little hug."

There was no great enthusiasm in the latter declaration. Nor did the former Princess Viatka display any enthusiasm so far as accepting the suggestion was concerned.

"You two boys stay here," she said as she moved off. "I'm going to call Agatha."

Turga had followed his volunteer guide into a lofty and somewhat barren hallway—as gloomy and spectral as a cave. It would have seemed natural had bats swarmed down from the remote corners, if a ghost or two had stalked forth from the dark oak paneling.

"I just love this place," Agatha confessed tremulously.

"So do I," Turga asserted.

He had slipped his arm through hers without creating any visible impression on the graven mask of a footman standing near.

"Let's explore."

"Let's." Turga accented somewhat the pressure of his arm.

They passed from the hallway into a great library, only a little less gloomy. It thrilled Turga with pleasant anticipation as he sensed Agatha's obvious purpose to lead him somewhere, anywhere, away from prying eyes.

She twisted open the *espagnolette* of a French window, and they found themselves on a little stone porch, commanding an exquisite view of park and garden.

"What did you think of me this morning?" quavered Agatha, with

her back turned, as she busied herself with the window.

Turga's hand trembled slightly as it touched her waist. The soft hair curling on the back of her neck was wonderfully attractive, he thought.

The former Princess Viatka, once alone, with that dollar of ill-omen in her possession, was tremulous, excited. She had no definite purpose—only a vague idea of confronting Turga, of questioning him concerning it and his possession of it.

She came at last to the French window through which Turga and her daughter had passed but a little while before. She stopped short, with her hand pressed to her heart—the hand that held the dollar.

She had seen Agatha throw back her head with swooning abandonment, had seen Turga press his lips to hers.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A FACE IN THE GLASS.

ALONE that night in his apartments, Turga again took thought of Paulo. It was as though there had been a death in the family—as though death had removed the only other member of the only family he had ever known. There was no word. The old servant had disappeared as completely as though he had never existed, although on every hand there was still abundant evidence of his long devotion. Yet how changed was the place!

For the first time in years Turga dressed himself for the evening without assistance. Now that he had passed for a time at least from under the influence of the interests that had enthralled him during the day his conscience smote him. After all, he couldn't desert poor old Paulo like that.

Still wondering, still distraught, he strolled into the Checker Club. There was a letter there for him. It was a brief note from Hugh Frail and en-

closed was his check for ten thousand dollars.

With the slip of paper in his hand Turga fell into a reverie. After a minute or two he went into a private room and got his banker on the telephone. The man had gone home for the night, but he could give Turga the information he desired. The usual date for his monthly remittance from Bohemia had passed almost a week ago, but the remittance this time had failed to materialize.

He loitered through a portion of the evening at a theater, then went again to his apartments. Still no Paulo. Still no word.

He summoned his chauffeur and asked him if he could recall the place where he had been guided by Paulo the night before.

"Sure thing," said the man.

"Take me there."

They ran south once into the zone of loneliness beyond.

Once more they made their way through those spirit-haunted streets. Then clamor broke out in the form of a fire-engine, hurtling through a street, a couple of blocks ahead. It recalled the "Walküre" of the night before.

Turga could still see the sparks in the street, a few moments later, when the chauffeur brought the automobile to a stand at the corner where he had waited the night before.

There was a glow of red to the east. That was the direction that Paulo had taken.

With a slight quickening of his pulse, with snatches of the "Walküre" music alternately droning and throbbing through his head, Turga started off in that direction.

He suspected the truth even before he had traversed half of the distance. Black hallways and dismal courts were vomiting their black froth of human misery. Fire was a spectacle, with always the possibility of loot.

As Turga rounded the corner he was suddenly confronted with a near

prospect of whirling flame, a pillar of dancing fire surmounted by a wallowing cloud of spark-shot smoke.

In the fitful, sinister illumination thrown out by this tremendous torch, he could read the name on the burning building. It was W. G. Frail.

In spite of his premonition, he experienced a tightening of his throat, a catching of his breath. He seemed to hear again in the roar of the flames—

We take again what was never sold.

"Any lives lost?" he asked a policeman who was shooing back the crowd.

"Not yet," the policeman answered.

"Was no one in the building?" he persisted.

The policeman glanced at him impatiently, then glanced again with increased interest.

"Naw; that place hasn't been in use for the past thirty years. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; except that I know the owners."

He felt very small in the presence of that dancing giant of smoke and flame—as Aladdin might have felt in the presence of the Jinnee of the Lamp. Only he knew, did Turga, that he was not master but slave.

As he turned to go he discovered that he had been standing in front of a cheap restaurant, long since closed for the night. There was a section of unclean mirror in the window, designed no doubt to conceal things still more unclean beyond.

He caught a reflection of his face—weirdly lighted, each feature distorted and accentuated by the light of the fire.

He shuddered, then laughed. He hadn't recognized himself. He looked older. He looked like *Mephistopheles*.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE OPEN WINDOW.

TURGA wasn't the only one who was reviewing just then the events of the

past twenty-four hours. Twice Mrs. Frail had snapped on the light at the side of her canopied bed, had coaxed calm and forgetfulness and possibly sleep with the suavest of Bosnian cigarettes. It was of no use.

She swore softly under her breath in Russian, but she confessed to herself that she wasn't precisely unhappy. *Ennui* was the only thing she feared, and there was no immediate prospect of that, not with this renaissance of old fears and superstitions, not with the young Count Turga as her latest plaything.

Not since her husband, Horace Frail, had been brought back to Schloss Frelinghuysen from the woody dueling-ground had she been so tremulous.

For a long time she lay there looking at her dressing-table, as though half expecting some demonstration of the supernatural. It was so odd that the *thaler* should thus have come back into the family—doubly odd that this should have occurred on the very day that the dismal Melnik had called to croak his warning.

At last she could stand the sensation of unsatisfied expectancy no longer. She slid her pink feet out of bed and into a pair of wadded Turkish slippers.

She scurried over to the table and, opening a drawer, took out the shining silver disk—the dollar which she had discovered that afternoon in her son's possession, the same dollar, she made no doubt, that she had seen the night before in possession of the strange and disconcerting young Turga; the same, she was equally sure, that she had seen among her husband's possessions that last day that they had carried him home.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*!"

She believed in curses. Her mind ran back over the old wives' tales she had heard in the long winter evenings in southern Russia, stories of the frightful crimes and superstitions and witchcrafts which prevailed in that part

of Europe during the close of the dark ages, during the religious wars, during the time that the ogres of the past were at death-grip with the young giants of the new era.

That there still lived lost tribes of the old régime in various parts of central Europe she was convinced. Even after her marriage, and she and her handsome husband had gone to live in the historic Frelinghuysen Castle, she had heard stories about the "cave-dwellers" of the wild mountain neighborhood that made her shudder.

Descendants and followers still were they of the great and terrible Munzner; all that was left of his earthly dream of becoming a second Mohammed; sharers still of some of the dark secrets and rituals that had at last brought him to the stake.

Instead of distressing her, these souvenirs brought to Mrs. Frail an exquisite thrill of fear and excitement. She had nurtured such sentiments ever since she was a very little girl. After a manner they had become necessary to her happiness.

She caressed the sinister coin. Placed it against her cheek. Tried to imagine that she felt the pricking tingle of esoteric emanations.

There are two explanations of what followed—there are for almost every event in life, whether the event be spiritual or physical.

One explanation is that Mrs. Frail still carried her lighted cigarette in her fingers; that it was the coal of fire at the end of it that touched the delicate texture of her throat.

The other explanation—and the one which she accepted—was that it was the coin that burned her; that she had felt the thrust of Belial's red-hot claw. Her old nurse had told her about such things back in Russia.

But this is certain. As she brought the coin down the side of her face it seemed to her lively imagination that it actually did carry with it a little trail of heat. She had brought it to that extra-delicate corner of the human



mask just under the jawbone, midway betwixt ear and chin, when she let out a half-stifled cry which was both shriek and curse.

There had been a stab of hot pain— instant, terrible.

For a moment she was wholly dominated by frenzied panic. It was for this thing that her imagination had been cunningly preparing her. She reeled, saw her open window, and hurled the coin into the darkness.

As though her experience was not already bad enough, there was to be one additional feature of it which she was never to forget.

The coin disappeared. She waited with straining senses to hear it fall on the cement driveway outside. There came no sound. It was this final, uncanny exit that affected her more than anything else. It was as though the thing had melted into thin air.

She tiptoed over to her window and looked out. The cement driveway below, the unbroken stone wall of the neighboring house just opposite. There was not a rug nor a square of sod— nothing—that could have deadened the sound like that.

She went back to her mirror and examined her wound. It was a burn; there was no questioning that—a red mark and a blister, to say nothing of the pain.

She dressed her wound with cream. She shuddered and smoked. It was rarely that she had been so happy— not since coming to America.

She crawled back into her bed and slept like a baby.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FALSE DAWN.

MUCH to the surprise of his family and friends, Hugh Frail lingered on at Cherry Hills long after his shoulder and collar-bone were well again. A new interest had come into his hitherto aimless life. It was as though he had been very short-sighted and had

been supplied by the Master Oculist with a perfect lens. The lens was the crystal—clear character of Elin Carstairs.

Their acquaintance had ripened. She was something different from any girl he had ever known before. She was a drink of spring-water to a man tired of champagne.

Young Frail, by the same token, was getting acquainted with Cherry Hills. Its thousand acres of hills and valleys, of woods and meadows, was becoming something else than a mere place to dawdle away empty hours, where he could shoot and ride and flirt without constraint. Deep in his nature was the atavistic love of nature common to all men. Miss Carstairs had developed and strengthened this.

She was the priestess of the great god Pan. She had been reared in the open. She knew the flowers and birds and trees. Dogwood, tulip, the different oaks and maples—even such foreign trees as the Japanese *kiri* and the Chinese *ginkgo*—were old friends.

"You make me feel like a nit," said Hugh one day as they strolled through one of the remoter corners of the Cherry Hills estate.

"What's a nit?" she asked blithely.

"Everything you're not—nothing that you are," he answered feelingly. "You know, something like what a night in town is compared to a day like this out here in the country."

It was a gorgeous day in the late Indian summer—blue and old gold, the smell of dead leaves and an occasional faint whiff of burning brush.

Miss Carstairs's only answer was her sympathetic, blue-eyed smile.

"I know nothing; you know everything," Frail went on, his pretense of humor touched with wistfulness. "I'm a poor actor; you're a queen. When I think of what I am, have been, and always will be, and what you are, have been, and always will be—gee, I feel like—"

He doubled up his fist and thumped himself on the side of the head.

Miss Carstairs's eyes were very alert and she was still smiling.

"I don't deserve all that; neither do you," she said half seriously. "You have this wonderful present—a still more wonderful future."

"Do you believe it?" he asked appealingly. "Jove, Elin, you don't know what an awful lot of good it does me to hear you say a thing like that!"

"Of course I mean it—it's perfectly true."

"You're the only person who does believe it—the only person who ever said so, at any rate. You know, Elin, I'm a rather bad lot. Everybody says so, and Lord knows I've given them cause. But, honestly, I'm not altogether rotten."

He laughed at his own seriousness.

"Just see how I rise when—when you make a cast like that. Really, you know, you're the first girl who ever talked sense to me; who could tell the names of trees and everything like that. And yet sometimes I like to think that I'm not a mere blithering idiot."

Again he laughed, but there was no disguising the *cri de coeur*, the profound sincerity of what he was saying.

A shade of wistfulness swept lightly across Elin Carstairs's face also—a passing cloud, a moistening of her eyes, suggesting the lightest, briefest of showers.

"Look at that beautiful young larch over there," she said, turning to him with sudden inspiration. "It's beautiful because it's growing up under good conditions—good ground, plenty of liberty, yet protected. What chance would it have in the city streets? They couldn't make it grow. Perhaps you're a larch."

"I see the point," he answered, reaching over and giving her nearer hand a grateful little squeeze. "But, you know, the larches were never—"

"Never?"

Frail didn't answer. He appeared to be struggling for a moment or two

to find adequate expression for some thought that was forming in his mind, then decided not to express it, after all.

They had come out of the woods onto a knoll overlooking a valley back of the house. At the bottom of the valley a small army of men were excavating an enormous basin. There was a steam-shovel at work. Steam-drills were tapping away at granite rocks. Steam-winchies were helping team-drawn wagons from the excavation to the road.

"See how rapidly they're getting along with the lake," said Frail, grateful for a change of interest. "Later on we're going to have a moat—a moat with running water in it right round the house."

"And why a moat?" asked Miss Carstairs. "I should think that it would cost an awful lot of money—an awful lot of money to spend when it won't do any good."

"There's a reason."

"Vanity."

"Not altogether. I wasn't going to say what I had in my mind a little while ago," said Frail seriously, "but I'll say it, anyway. I was going to say that the larch family wasn't under a curse. You wouldn't have to surround the home of the larches, for example, with running water to keep away the family ghost."

He broke off with a laugh in which there was no humor and glanced at Miss Carstairs, curious as to just how she would take the declaration. She took it seriously enough. She was thinking of the family history—of all the tragedies that had become legendary about the names of both Frelinghuysen and Frail.

"There are no ghosts," said Elin Carstairs—"that is, none that can't cross running water."

"By Jove," agreed Frail, "I believe you're right at that, you know! It was an idea of my mother's. She's dreadfully superstitious—along with other things."

He paused. He was looking curi-

ously at a dark-eyed workman who happened to pass that way. The man turned. Their eyes met.

Frail turned to Miss Carstairs.

"It's curious," he said. "When that fellow looked at me just now I felt as though the ghost were actually there."

## CHAPTER XX.

### "A DARK YOUNG MAN."

MISS CARSTAIRS had often seen the old woman before, but had always avoided her. Even the healthiest of young persons bred in the open air have just a thread of superstition. And there was something about this old woman that made her nervous. She might have been a gipsy, only there was more intellect in the swarthy face and beady eyes than usual—something even of majesty in her decrepit form.

In spite of her desire to pass the old woman by this time with nothing more than a mere salutation, Miss Carstairs paused. The old woman had looked at her in a way that was both appeal and command.

"You wish to ask me something?" Elin said.

"Not to ask, but to tell," the old woman answered with a strong foreign accent.

"What can you tell?" Miss Carstairs asked with the fearlessness of innocence.

"Your future, beautiful princess," the old woman responded with unflinching eyes.

Miss Carstairs colored slightly, then smiled.

"I don't believe in such things."

"I am very old. I already see with the eyes of my spirit, even as those who are already dead."

As though to give physical proof of this odd declaration, the old woman continued to stare at the younger one as though already she were delving into that perfumed temple of dreams.

The unintentional poetry of what she had just said appealed to Miss Carstairs's imagination.

"It is true that you are very old," she said. "Wisdom does come with age."

"And with youth, as well, daughter mine."

"I am not wise."

"Yea, you're wise—wise enough to listen to the voice of age, even as you have already listened to the voice of God's out of doors."

"I have no money."

"No more than I, no more than the moon, my beautiful wood-pigeon. I ask no money. I need none. There'll always be a coin to put between my teeth for the Ferryman. And him we cannot cheat."

The old woman had continued to look into Miss Carstairs's face with unflinching interest.

"But lately," she went on, "there have come into your life two young men, both of them dark, both of them of foreign strain. Tell me, is this not true?"

"It is true—a great many people have seen them about here."

"But have not seen the inside of your head, little baroness."

"Have you?"

"I see it now—how these two young men have absorbed your thought. No, do not blush—there is nothing there to be ashamed of, nothing that your mother in heaven could not see and smile about. But your blue eyes will shed many tears because of them."

"I don't want to hear evil predictions," said Miss Carstairs.

"You listen to the voice of Fate," said the old woman steadily. "It will not be because of yourself that you weep, but because of these two young men. Can't you already see that one must die before the other two can laugh?"

Miss Carstairs pressed her hand to her heart.

"What you say is terrible."

"Terrible and grand."

"Which—which—" the girl had intended to ask the question lightly, but she couldn't quite get it out.

"Which—which? It is always so. Which will die and which will laugh—the eternal question of the universe. But I will answer it for you, my cygnet. He will first die who first kisses you."

"Then I'll—I'll kiss neither."

"Are young men in the habit of asking permission to kiss a rose-petal cheek like yours? Listen, there's yet something else. It will be he to whom you first give your love."

"I'll give my love to neither," said Miss Carstairs, with a species of horror despite the manifest absurdity of what was being said.

But the old woman continued to look at her unflinchingly, with no smile to relieve her compelling seriousness.

"Has the fear of death ever stopped a girl from giving her love?" the old woman asked.

"I'll warn them," said Elin with a trembling lip.

"Yea, warn away the night."

For the first time the old woman smiled, but it was a sort of uncanny, supernatural smile.

"It is easy, indeed," she added, as though to explain that smile of hers, "to see that you are innocent."

Again a quick wave of color overspread Miss Carstairs's face.

"I must be going," she said.

"To forget what I've told you?"

"Yes."

"Nay, you'll not forget," the old woman replied steadily. "Both young and old forget the past. Neither of them ever forget the future."

These words still lingered in Miss Carstairs's brain as she drew near her home. Reason as she could, she was unable to overcome a queer feeling of apprehension, a sense of having caught a glimpse through the impenetrable veil.

Once she paused and looked back,

half tempted to search out the old woman again and question her further. But what she deemed to be her better sense—perhaps, after all, it was the hand of Fate—got the better of her momentary debate, and she kept on down the woodland road toward her home.

The melancholy trees were so silent, steeped in mystery as never before.

She turned the last bend and saw a motor-car standing in front of her father's gate.

In it was the young Count Carlos Turga.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE FALLEN ANGEL.

As he saw her, he sent the car forward in her direction. While he was still at a distance she could see a light in his eyes that she had glimpsed there on the occasion of their conversation in the sunken garden, that she had seen afterward once or twice since then when they had met.

"What luck!" Turga was saying. "I drove out all the way from New York to see you, if only for a minute. I was so afraid that I was going to have to go back unrewarded."

He had brought the car to a halt, had leaped to the road, had taken one of her hands in his. She drew back slightly, a wee bit frightened, the words of the old woman still uppermost in her mind.

But her reticence merely increased his fervor.

"Tell me that you're not sorry," he pleaded, half seriously, half teasingly.

"I'm not sorry, but—"

"Not but; just not sorry," he interrupted her. "You don't know how much good you can do a fellow by simply existing—something like the ozone, something like all this."

He waved his hand at the surrounding woods and smiled.

Elin had never seen him look so handsome. The impression made upon

her by the old woman was fading fast. Her optimism was all but unshakable. She reflected that there would be a full hour before supper-time.

"You've been feeling blue," she deduced.

"As a whetstone. Do you know, it's becoming quite a habit of mine—when I'm away from you."

"Sh!" she chided.

"It's the truth. You know, you told me yourself to be absolutely truthful."

She colored prettily, glanced at him from the corner of her eyes. She had never seen his face so serious, so illumined. Even his voice had in it a thrill which had never been there before.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"The greatest of occupations—thinking of you."

"I thought you promised me to look for work—'to catch a job,' as you expressed it."

"Preparation. I've been preparing myself—getting a better outlook. If I'd gone out looking for a job without first saturating myself in your heavenly influence I suppose I'd been just a bartender, or a *croupier*, or something like that. Now—now I wouldn't be satisfied with anything lower than a—than a soda-fountain clerk, or something like that."

"Will you always joke about it?"

"I'm not joking." He laughed shortly. "I know it sounds like a joke," he went on seriously; "but I am sort of making myself over with your help."

"I only wish I could help you!"

"Help me! Great Lord! you are helping me; neither you nor any one will ever know how much."

By common consent they both entered the machine, and Turga was driving slowly along.

As she looked at him with an appreciative, modest smile, he reached over and again nestled one of her hands in his.

"You can't imagine what a distaste I've taken for tango teas and all that sort of thing. I think, think, think, like a good fellow. Listen; do you know what I've decided to do?"

His voice had become more serious than ever. She slowly shook her head, absorbed already in what he was going to say.

"I've decided to shake my fist under the nose of Fate, and if he gets gay—"

Miss Carstairs caught her breath slightly.

"What do you know about Fate?" she asked, trying to make the question sound light and indifferent.

"What do I know about Fate?"

A sudden silence fell, broken only by the pebbly tread of the rubber tires on the road, by the thousand fine, small voices of the woods. The silence had brought a resurgence of undefinable alarm in Miss Carstairs's heart. There was something of this in her face as she turned and asked again very softly:

"What do you know about Fate?"

"What do I know about Fate?"

For an interval he did not answer, then the hand that held hers tightened its hold. He was driving very slowly, just creeping along.

"I've been thinking a whole lot about Fate," he said. "I've become quite an expert on the subject. And I've come to the conclusion that there is something in the world still stronger."

"Faith?"

"Stronger than faith," he answered.

"What, then?" she whispered, then bit her lip.

She knew that there was only one answer in the world that he could give—had known it even before the question sprang to her lips; yet she knew that in her heart she had made no effort to keep it back.

"Love, Elin."

"Don't say that," she murmured with a tremulous lip.

"Why not?" he demanded fiercely.

"Oh, but perhaps it isn't stronger."

"But it is."

"Not always. Think of all the mothers who have loved their children and yet were unable to fight off Fate—oh, terrible Fate, just like a mad tiger with green eyes, mouth open, claws outspread!"

"Just watch me poke him in the slats," laughed Turga, trying to get her into a more cheerful mood.

Then he noticed that there were tears in her eyes. With a sudden exclamation of pity, he lifted his hand to her cheek. The touch of that warm, infinitely soft skin sent an electric thrill up his arm and through his entire body.

"Elin," he said in a faltering whisper, "it is you whom I love. It's my love for you that'll be too strong for Fate. I love you—love you!"

The machine had purred to a standstill and stood tremulous—like a thing alive and expectant.

Turga leaned over and, before she could suspect his intention, had kissed her lightly on the cheek.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### ELIN SEES A GHOST.

FOR a moment or two the whole universe stood still. It wouldn't have been very much different had some catalytic force reduced the world to primeval chaos. During that moment Elin Carstairs was dumb, stricken. She was guilty. She was a murderess.

Then her woman's nature asserted itself. Tears sprang to her eyes. The hot blood rushed to her cheek. She turned to the man at her side with tragic pity in her face and voice.

"Oh, Carlos! Oh, Carlos!"

She could say no more.

He also for a moment had remained thunderstruck. He had had a fleeting impression that he had mortally offended her. He had had much experience with girls of one kind and an-

other, but never, he reflected with all the speed of thought—never, with one like this. But, as she turned her face to his, as he saw the expression there, he felt a mighty surge of chivalry, of adoration even. He had really felt that he loved her before, but it hadn't been like this.

"Elin!" he whispered. "My Elin!"

For another eternal moment they looked into each other's eyes—hers blue, seraphic; his earthborn, glowing.

"Oh, Carlos," she repeated as she sought to explain. "I am so frightened!"

Her words, so simple, so girlish, broke the spell. He laughed, leaned forward slightly as though he would have cured her fear by repeating the cause of it. She drew back.

"Don't!" she warned, in a whisper.

"Why not?"

"It frightens me."

"Nothing can happen to you—not," he added, "except over my dead body."

"Don't say that," she panted.

She smote her breast with a white fist, controlled herself with an effort.

"What's the matter, Elin?"

Elin smiled through her tears.

"I know that I'm foolish," she said, "but I wouldn't have had you do that for the world."

"Do what?"

She looked at him and shook her head.

"Say it."

"Kiss me," she faltered.

Turga laughed.

"Why, Elin, wouldn't you want to see me made a knight, a superman, a greater than king or President or Czar? That is what I have become. That is what you have done for me."

Again she murmured: "Oh, Carlos!"

"Listen, Elin," he went on; "some foolish people thought that they could do with me as they would, thought that they could get me mixed up in



some old curse of theirs, thought they could put over on me some jinx about Fate—"

His voice had become softer than ever, soothing, pleading. Elin had begun to cry gently, like a sorrowing child, hiding her eyes with a tiny handkerchief.

"—and I thought it was so until you came into my life. Then I knew that there was something else.

"It always has been that way," he went on, as though arguing as much to convince himself as he was to convince her. "There always have been two forces in the world—good and evil. Every religion, every philosophy, concedes that this is so. And they all concede that the good is stronger than the bad.

"Oh, Elin honey, can't you see what you mean to me—what you always will mean to me? You are the good, the good! I've had so little of it in my life. I've been hoodooed. I've never had any love. They tried to damn me—money and nothing to do, nothing to love but myself. I'm sick of it! You've shown me a new world. You've created me a new Eden. You've give me religion. You've given me deity!"

He paused, overcome with emotion. His face was very pale. Into his eyes had come all the fervor of an adept at prayer.

Miss Carstairs had taken her handkerchief from her eyes, a wet, little ball of linen, no larger than her dimpled thumb. At first she had listened to Turga with the ineffable sweetness of a girl who listens with a responsive heart to the voice of her first lover. Again her fears faded, her native qualities of hope and courage and cheerfulness rising triumphant, when she caught sight of a face beyond the hedge.

It was as though she had seen a ghost.

She was still peering in the direction of that haunting vision as Turga finished speaking. Only gradually he

took note of her changed expression. He had been talking to her spiritual presence, not to the physical Elin Carstairs, in that period of transport.

What he saw baffled him at first; gradually brought him back to earth with a growing sense of wonder and pain.

Was it possible that she hadn't even been listening to him? It was incredible. For several seconds he remained silent, staring at her.

"Elin"—his voice was changed, hoarse, curiously dead—"what is it—what has come over you—what did you see?"

"Take me home," she said with a pitiful little smile.

"What did you see?" he repeated.

As is the case with most sensitive natures, his pain was easily translatable into anger.

"Oh, is it possible," cried Miss Carstairs, "that I should bring pain to those I have just learned to love?"

"To those?"

The question had about it the essence of accusation.

"Oh, Carlos, can't you understand?"

"Great God, Elin, what am I to understand? I throw my bleeding heart at your feet, and you stare off into the bushes at some bird or other!"

"Don't—don't speak like that," Miss Carstairs pleaded softly. There was no anger in her face, only pain and fear.

"I ask you what's the matter?" Turga said. "Are you promised to another? Is it back to—back to the inferno for me?"

"Not promised!" cried Miss Carstairs in a small, strained voice. "Not promised to any one, dear Carlos. But just now I saw—oh, I'm so frightened! Oh, everything is going wrong; I didn't want to say."

"Saw what?"

"Saw Hugh Frail—and his face looked—"

Something mightier than any will of his sent the blood pounding into

Turga's head. He affected a laugh as he set the machine in motion and began to negotiate a turn. But the laugh sounded, somehow, terrible and sickening even to himself.

Miss Carstairs completed her sentence in a frightened whisper, "—like a ghost."

Turga was like a dead man, an automaton, a thing without sensation. His visions had faded. He felt that his hands were cold. The light had gone out of the landscape.

It was as though he saw through a black veil. And he was only dimly conscious of the ride back to the Carstairs gate, of his perfunctory leave-taking, of the long, cheerless, spectral drive to town.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ONE WAY TO KILL TIME.

LIKE a good many other persons with plenty of money and nothing to do, Agatha Frail was keen for any sort of a suggestion that promised to kill a few bothersome hours in a pleasant fashion. Society, as she understood it, was organized to this end.

For what other purpose were books written, music composed, theaters built, and games invented? To what other end, indeed, were charities, guilds, settlements, and other things like that organized? Plainly not for the sake of the uninteresting creatures they were supposed to help.

It was this view of things, rather than any innate love of her fellow men, that had moved her to accept membership in a certain society for the protection of Bohemian immigrants.

But she had passed a good deal of her young life in Bohemia. On the whole, she preferred Czechs to other nationalities, and her purse was no more limited than her time.

She confessed to herself that a combination of these motives had inspired her sudden and unrestrained interest

in the young Count Turga. He had promised well, both as a time-killer and a Czech.

But Turga had dropped out of sight—a fortnight or so, a terribly long time according to her system of reckoning. She wondered if it were possible that he had become interested in Elin Carstairs. Agatha was not of the kind that mourn. She shrugged her young shoulders and piously decided on charity again.

The particular group of young women with whom she was associated had arranged an excursion to Ellis Island. It was an annual affair, destined, no doubt, to accomplish a world of good. The excursion happened to fall on a day when there was an unusually large influx of Bohemians through New York's water-gate. The young women were delighted.

They saw many interesting things. Two or three hours were slain, not without profit to numerous immigrant children. And for most of the members of the party it was thus that the day became a memory.

But for Agatha Frail the day was not to end there. Her sympathy had been elicited from the first by a certain immigrant girl with yellow hair, a Turkey-red shirt-waist, and a face of such broad candor as to make her look like nothing so much as a six-foot child.

She spoke the Bohemian dialect of the peasants in the neighborhood of Schloss Frelinghuysen. When Agatha addressed her in this dialect the innocent giantess was instantly for falling on her knees.

"What is your name?" asked Agatha.

"Maria Duba, excellency."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Three days already, excellency."

"Where are your friends?"

"I have none, highness."

"And relatives?"

"I have only a father, well born."

"And where is he?"

Maria, from a pocket in her capacious plaited skirt, drew out a piece of paper with a name and address printed on it. It seemed that the officials had already sent several inquiries to the place mentioned, but had been unable up to the present to get a satisfactory answer.

The first thing that attracted Agatha's attention was the number and avenue—an address she recognized. It was the home of Count Turga. Then she read the name. That, also, she recognized.

It was that of Maria Duba, Turga's former servant.

Maria, regarding any one who could speak her native dialect as a bright messenger sent from heaven, especially when this person was a beautiful young woman, had opened the vials of her pent-up emotion, was reciting the litany of her past.

Her father had been so many years in America. Recently her mother had died. Almost every one else whom she knew was coming to America. She was young, strong as an ox, ambitious as an archduchess, and so she had followed suit.

"I'll help you," said Agatha.

A young inspector, whose duties elsewhere had been unable to get him beyond ear-shot, was at her side in an instant.

"Isn't there some way," she asked, "in which I can stand sponsor for this girl, take her under my protection—oh, anything to give her a good start?"

The inspector was sure of it. They were still discussing what was best under the circumstances when another inspector called the girl's name in a raucous voice from the other side of an iron grille—the Ellis Island equivalent for being paged.

"Some one calling for her now," said the inspector. "Her father, perhaps."

It was very exciting. Agatha Frail felt almost as though it was she who was held prisoner on the island, that

her name had been called by a voice from the vast, mysterious continent beyond the grille.

They all went forward together—she and the inspector and Maria Duba. And it was Maria who looked through the grille at the waiting visitor with placid indifference. It was the other girl who uttered a little cry of pleased recognition.

Count Turga, still hopeful of discovering the whereabouts of Paulo, had heard with the utmost interest about the inquiry which had come up from Ellis Island. From his abundant leisure he had taken sufficient time to look into the matter himself.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

Ah! that golden age when two young people look at each other, and not only demand the impossible, but promise it with equal facility! The excitement of it, the inspiration! Both of them felt it—both Agatha Frail and Carlos Turga, as they stood there on the lower sea-wall of New York with Maria Duba standing complacently at their side.

Their conversation had quickened, had taken on the additional thrill of speed. For already a group of loiterers were standing near, the nucleus of a crowd.

Not even in the neighborhood of the barge office do they see every day two distinguished young people with a blond giantess in tow.

"It's the first time that I've ever asked you anything," said Agatha, with sparkling eyes.

They had patched up a truce coming across on the Ellis Island ferry. At first Agatha was not going to forgive him—no, never—for keeping out of sight so long after he had—he had—well, it wasn't necessary to say what. They both remembered well enough.

"But I tell you I've been looking for Paulo myself for the past month,"

said Turga. "There isn't anybody in New York that I've wanted so much to see. That is, except—"

He flashed a dark-eyed smile upon Agatha.

She also smiled, but was insistent.

"I tell you," she declared firmly, "that I've told this girl that we'd find her father for her. I don't care how you do it, but you must do it. Now!"

"But, Agatha—"

"Don't make excuses."

Her eyes were sparkling—just a suggestion of the volcanic fire which always glowed very near the surface, anyway, beneath that gray ash. A heightened color had crept up above her cheeks and just below the temples, making her very picturesque, very adorable, a trifle dangerous.

"By gad, Agatha!" cried Turga softly, "when you look like that I'd promise you the moon—promise it to you and get it."

"You'll do it—"

"And you'll meet me—"

"Anywhere you say."

"Stay home and wait for a telephone call. It may be late."

"I don't give a—d-a-rn!" said Agatha, the volcanic fire glowing in earnest.

"And the girl?"

"I'll have her with me. I love her—has the strength of Gibraltar!"

"Me too?"

"Yes, if—"

Even while he was talking Turga had already begun to formulate a plan. It was something that he would never have thought of without the knout of Agatha Frail's inspiration. Before the taxi conveying the rich girl and the immigrant was out of sight, Turga entered the subway. Before an hour had passed he was driving his own car at reckless speed over the familiar road to Cherry Hills.

He feared as much. It was past one o'clock before he reached his destination. Through the still air he could hear the busy tapping of the steam-drills, the cough and strain of

the steam-shovel again at work, after the noon recess.

He had left his machine in a little grove off to one side of an unfrequented road running back of the Cherry Hills estate. He had carefully avoided any chance of meeting either Hugh Frail or Elin Carstairs. A sediment of bitterness still clogged his heart with regard to them, but his present quest absorbed him pretty much to the exclusion of everything else.

It was already yielding excitement. It promised more. Nor was he disappointed.

He had taken up his position where he could watch the men who were at work on the new lake. Heavily loaded wagons came and went with no great supervision. One stranger more or less about the place attracted no particular attention.

At last he made out the man he was looking for—the dark-eyed workman who had looked at him so strangely that day he stood in the sunken garden with Elin Carstairs. He watched this man with the passionate scrutiny of an Apache stalking a ranchman.

His opportunity came when the man started over a knoll to the temporary shelter where the contractor had stored his dynamite. Turga lost no time. He hailed him in the language of the Cechs.

"I have a question to ask," said Turga.

The man had recognized him, had smiled slightly, had started on as though he intended to pay no attention.

"I have a question to ask," Turga repeated, placing himself in front of his quarry.

There was that about both his voice and his manner that brought the other up short. He glanced about him. They were quite alone.

"I can answer no questions," said the man.

"You'll answer this one," Turga answered. "You'll tell me, my friend, what has become of Paulo Duba."

The man uttered a half-hearted denial, but his whole demeanor showed that he was lying.

Turga's long wait had not improved his disposition. He felt within himself a resurgence of fighting independence. In a way, the man in front of him personified the crushing weight of the destiny that had been oppressing him ever since that memorable night when Paulo had disappeared.

"Listen," he said softly. "We're brothers, aren't we—grandsons of the same grandmother?"

"Yes, brothers," said the man, recoiling slightly.

"Cain and Abel," laughed Turga.

The man had started to run, but before he had taken half a dozen steps Turga had seized him by the throat and twisted him round.

There was a guttural curse, a sound of heavy breathing, of straining muscles.

There fell a momentary silence through which there rushed a sparkling shower of lesser sounds—the twitter of birds, the distant tapping of the steam-drills, the far voices of men at work.

Turga released his hold somewhat. He hadn't escaped altogether unscathed. He had an unmistakable premonition that one of his eyes was going shut.

There was a hot streak down the side of his face. He was perspiring. But his heart was exultant with a sense of triumph.

The man sucked in the air with the strident gasp of a vacuum-pump.

"Mercy, my prince," he gurgled, "and I'll tell you!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

IF Turga had been as good as his word, so also had been Agatha Frail. She had worn herself to a frazzle answering telephone-calls all day, had thrice repulsed the assiduous Frederic

Graw, 3rd, had broken, at least, two previous engagements, and declined other suggestions and invitations as quickly as they arrived. She hadn't passed such a delightful day for a long time—an intermittent flutter of excitement with periods of stimulating intercourse with Maria Duba between.

Not since she had become the proprietor of a St. Bernard dog, years ago, in her childhood, had she had such a diverting plaything. Maria displayed about the same degree of prompt and fathomless devotion.

Again Maria saw the wonderful young lady consult the still more wonderful instrument in the alcove at the head of the stairs; this time saw her give unquestionable symptoms of renewed excitement and delight. Miss Frail had hugged the instrument to her heart, had twisted her silken ankles together in a sort of ecstasy, then, to Maria's delight, had dropped into the language which she could understand.

"You're a dear," "You're a wonder," "You won't do any such thing," "Well, perhaps; just once"—these were the English equivalents of some of the things that Maria heard.

Mrs. Frail took only an indifferent interest in Agatha's activities. She belonged to the race of women in whom the maternal instinct is not particularly strong, however many children might come their way. Agatha pleaded further activity on behalf of the immigrant society, and was free.

Maria, in raiment more subdued—and with the first hat that she ever owned enhancing her bucolic beauty—but with spirits even gayer than her discarded Turkey-red shirt-waist, was already waiting in the limousine as Agatha came out.

The chauffeur had a grin on his face. He knew a few words of Bohemian—the first words which young unmarried people generally acquire first of all when acquiring a new language.

America was surely a mighty fine

place, thought Maria, where even the gentlemen drivers were so pleasant.

They picked up Turga at a point on the East Drive of Central Park. He had done his best to improve his appearance, but he still bore about him unquestionable signs of battle.

"For you," he whispered in explanation as he entered the limousine, then checked himself and looked at Maria. He had spoken in Bohemian.

"Don't mind her," said Agatha without premeditation.

Turga didn't.

The automobile passed over to the east side of the city. It was the hour when the ten thousand shops and factories in the neighborhood of Fourteenth Street were emptying themselves of the industrial army which every morning marches up the hill and every evening marches down again.

"Let's walk—let's join the parade," said Agatha.

"I'm on," said Turga. "The place is not very far anyway."

A minute later they had left the car and joined the moving throng on the sidewalk. To any one habituated to the quieter, emptier streets up-town, it seemed incredible that so many people should be out on no other mission than that of their daily bread. No spectacle had brought them there. These were not the melting audience of a crowded *matinée*.

Nine, ten hours of grinding toil, and yet how lightly they swung along!

Turga, Agatha, even the untemperamental Maria, felt the thrill of it. They were carried along by a human cable as wide as the wide sidewalk and charged with Heaven knows how many volts of human electricity.

Agatha was storing up a new impression which she was to draw upon in later years. She thought, with something akin to shame, of her dreary days of *ennui*—of nothing to do.

The majority of the moving swarm in which she found herself were girls—girls of her own age and even younger. For another day they had

fought the old dragon of want, had won, were going back to their many-storied brick and plaster camps with the victory apparent in eye and lip and bearing.

It was almost as though pennants were flying and bands playing—invisible pennants, inaudible music, but there all the same.

"And what do they care about curses," Turga asked himself, "so long as they've got work? Work—a job! Just plain, ordinary, every-day labor! That's the thing which is stronger than fate, stronger than all the powers of hell. Not faith, not love—balderdash—but work!"

They passed down Second Avenue, then over through Ninth Street, still carried along in that eternal stream of girls and young men, principally girls. The stream branched at the corner of Tompkins Square—half of it running diagonally off through the square, like a real stream through a bit of woodland. It was this division that Turga followed with Agatha and the patient Maria—the latter perfectly at ease, patient, unquestioning.

After all, the experience which she was undergoing had nothing very surprising about it. One could expect anything in America. As for the palace in which she had spent the major portion of the afternoon, it was quite conceivable that before very many years she would have a place like that of her own. In America, as she knew full well, such things were always happening.

Beyond the square they came to another avenue, quaint, foreign, old-fashioned. There was that about it which suggested the streets of Prague itself.

They had entered another cross street a little farther on, and Turga was looking for a certain number, when behind him he heard a cry of affectionate delight—so full of heart it was almost a sob.

He and Agatha had left Maria a few steps behind them. They both



turned. They saw the blond giantess stooping slightly, peering through a sidewalk hedge of privet-bushes into a basement restaurant.

"Father! My father!"

Up from the depths from behind the screening hedge there rushed an old man.

It was Paulo.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### OLD WINES, NEW JOYS.

ORDINARILY, it would have been a dismal enough place—low ceiling, sanded floor, bare tables, a few time-stained chromos on the walls, an all-pervading redolence of exotic cookery and liquors. But it had been touched by the magician's wand. Had it been an alabaster hall hung with masterpieces and perfumed with frankincense and myrrh, it would have been the same.

For an elated moment or two father and daughter were so absorbed in each other that they had no attention for any one else.

Then Paulo saw Turga. He tore himself loose from the powerful embrace of the blond giantess. Dazed wonder, almost fear, mingled with the joy that was shining in his face.

"You, sir!" he gasped. "Why—"

Turga had stepped forward, was wringing the old man's hand.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" he asked.

"Here, sir; ever since—"

"But why didn't you tell me where you were? I've been looking everywhere for you. I've been worried about you."

"That was so good of you, sir!"

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"I dared not." The answer was given in a frightened whisper.

"Do you mean to say—"

"She ordered, sir."

"That old woman?"

Paulo nodded his head.

Miss Frail had stepped forward.

"Let Paulo and Maria enjoy each other for a moment, at least. What are you two talking about?"

Paulo smiled at the young woman and saluted respectfully.

"Paulo," said Turga, "do as she says. Miss Frail and I have enough to keep us busy for a while."

"Miss Frail, sir?"

This time the old man couldn't conceal the consternation in his face.

"Cheer up," Turga whispered. "We'll break all this curse business, old man."

Paulo was wearing the black jacket and white apron of a waiter. Sure enough, he had been employed—was still employed—in the little restaurant where they found themselves.

"We'll stay here for dinner," Miss Frail cried delightedly.

"What-ho," Turga agreed. "Agatha, you're a brick."

They took advantage of the fact that Paulo and his offspring were again immersed in family endearments and news from home, and that the restaurant was otherwise deserted, to execute a certain threat and promise delivered not so very long before over the phone.

"And I'll do it again," said Turga.

"So will I," laughed Agatha, enjoying the excitement.

A comely matron, with sparkling eyes and an ample bosom, appeared in the shadowy door at the back of the restaurant.

"Mme. Zidek!"

Paulo introduced them, spoke a few words rapidly. When Mme. Zidek again appeared she bore a very dusty bottle on a tray with a number of glasses.

"The wine of my country," she smiled, embracing the company in the breadth and warmth of it.

Skilfully she pulled the cork from the bottle's dusty nozzle, and there floated throughout the room an autumnal perfume of ripe grapes, of warm fields, of balsamic mountainsides. The wine ran thick and golden

into the sparkling glasses—a topaz necklace worthy of an empress.

Mme. Zidek passed the gems around, and, standing, they drank Maria's safe arrival.

The bouquet had presaged the quality of the wine. By its subtle alchemy it had suffused and transformed the social atmosphere of the place a good deal, as it had already beatified the physical atmosphere when the cork was pulled. There were no rich and no poor, no mere proprietress and waiter—bothers and sisters all.

Somehow or other, the evening deepened into night. There were not many customers and, so far as Turga was concerned—and so far as the others were concerned, perhaps—they came and went like shadows, mere fantoms of dark-eyed men, who came and ate and drank and smoked, then went away again.

Other bottles of captured sunshine from the Erz and Piesen foot-hills came and went, each leaving behind it something more of wealth and warmth—like fairy porters.

At last, of all the strangers who had been there, only one remained—a very old, somewhat distorted musician with a cunning and jovial face. He carried a hurdy-gurdy—one of those strange, old instruments in which a revolving wheel takes the place of the fiddler's bow.

The magic which he sent up from this was similar to the magic distilled from Mme. Zidek's wine—it was so filled with the same haunting suggestiveness of far, beautiful places; of charms and gaieties ripened through the ages; the very essence of these things.

The musician had also drunk of the wine. He had lingered there at their invitation. Then gradually there had come over his cunning and jovial face a veil of dreaminess.

The wheel of the hurdy-gurdy turned. The musician's fingers danced deftly on the keys. There whirled lightly up a wreath of elfin music.

"Bravo!" they cried.

Before the entire company—if the company cared to see—Turga leaned forward. So did Agatha. Their lips met.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### PAULO BECOMES A REBEL.

By imperceptible degrees the noises from the street outside had ceased. So far as the little party in the restaurant was concerned, the city of New York had ceased to be.

With all its millions of men and women—each one of whom was the center of an individual universe, with its individual set of hopes and fears, of loves and hatreds—it had disappeared into the gauzy nothingness of a little wine, of a little music.

"Perhaps the curse isn't so, sir."

Paulo had brought his chair closer to Turga's. They were no longer master and servant. Surface convention had disappeared, laying bare the granite of their long companionship and mutual trust.

"But you deserted me, Paulo."

"I had to. I would have stuck, sir, even had it meant the death of me. But I couldn't—I couldn't. No man, not even a father, can make things go the way he wants them to."

"What is it," asked Miss Frail, with her face close to theirs—"what it is you two are always talking about?"

"Does she know?" asked Paulo.

Turga shook his head, with his eyes on Agatha's.

"What is it?—I want to know."

On Agatha's face was the spell of curiosity—such an expression as might have been on the face of *Bluebeard's* last wife as she peered through the door of the forbidden chamber.

"Have you ever heard of the Frelinghuysen curse?" asked Turga.

"Yes."

"Do you believe in it?"

"Yes."

Agatha's face was glowing. She

was quivering with excitement. All the Slav in her nature was on top.

There fell a little lull. There came the soft voices of Maria and Mme. Zidek chatting happily together of far Bohemia. The elfin music of the old musician breezed in upon them—unreal, exotic. Now and then he quavered into a fragment of song, a mere shred of melody—a tattered rag of a voice, but still colorful.

"Well, don't," Turga answered with a fitful smile. "We'll break it. We'll show that there is no such thing."

"Oh, can you, sir?" sighed Paulo. "I have been wishing so that such a thing might be. But I was all alone. I was afraid. I even tried, sir, to go to see you, to get word to you. I could not. It was as though something gripped me, fastened me tight to the road I have followed since."

He paused, struck the table with his open palm. Into his face there came an expression of recollection, of new hope.

"It will be different, now that Maria has come. What better sign could we have that she is here to break the curse than that you, miss, and she should have thus met; that through you she should have found her father? My old mother, back in the Piesen *Gebirge*, used to tell me that there is only one way to fight the devil, and that is with kind acts. 'This you have done.'"

Again there fell a little lull. Once more the soft voices of Maria and Mme. Zidek came murmuring into audible prominence. Then once more the incessant, cadenced music of the old hurdy-gurdy player rippled in—a rising tide on a pebbly beach.

They heard his quavering voice—a mere echo of a voice—lilt brokenly the phrase of a song. To Turga there was something familiar about it. Perhaps this was true also in the case of Paulo. Both of them turned and looked in the musician's direction.

Oblivious, apparently, of everything except the fancies which he was spinning out of himself into his spider-

web music, the old man sat with his chin down, his eyes half closed, his left hand busy with the small curved crank of his instrument, his right deftly manipulating the keys.

"And what also gives me hope," Paulo resumed, "is that my life otherwise has not been disagreeable. Ah, she's a rare, fine woman, is Mme. Zidek."

Two tears—they seemed to be more shrunken and withered than the tears of a younger person might have been—glistened onto the rim of Paulo's eyes.

"Do you love her?" asked Agatha Frail, with spontaneous sympathy.

"I might very well do so," Paulo confessed.

"She'd make a wonderful mother for that girl of yours," said Turga. "Look at them now."

"Ah, no," said Paulo, disconsolately shaking his head. "What you say is true. But she is the proprietor of all this."

He waved his hand at the restaurant.

"And she has a wonderful cellar—a wonderful cellar. I am poor."

Agatha Frail was a gambler at heart. All this was a new game—one of the most interesting she had ever played. She reached out her pretty, delicate jeweled hand and let it rest on Paulo's.

"You're not poor," she whispered.

He caught her meaning. A tinge of color crept into his pallid face.

"You are generous," he said. His voice showed that he was touched. "As generous as you are beautiful," he went on, "but such a thing is impossible."

"It is not impossible," Agatha cried—vehement enough, though she kept her voice low. "You said, just now, that there was only one way to fight the devil. Give me the chance. I know all about the Frelinghuysen curse. I'm saturated with it."

"All my life I have heard but little else. I believe in it. I feel it. I know that it involves not only us, but others,

From what you have just said, you are one of these. And you, Carlos. Listen, we'll band together. We'll cast off this thing."

Her eyes had gone preternaturally bright.

There came another one of those lulls. The elfin, echolike music of the hurdy-gurdy zimmered and cadenced up and filled the room, and floating on the surface of it—like a chip on a moonlit river—was the voice of the player himself.

Once more Turga had that recurrent, insistent impression of having heard both words and music before. It was that way with Paulo.

They both turned slightly, listening, intent, their eyes meeting, shifting to the glorified face of Agatha Frail, then back again.

Then they recognized it—words and music:

—"And he builded his castles of blood  
and gold,  
Blood of our youth, the gold of our  
clan,  
But this is the end of the fated span—"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### ELIN WRITES A NOTE.

FOR the first time in her young life Elin Carstairs had some slight doubt as to the positive goodness of the world and everything in it. She had never found very much difficulty in maintaining this cheerful view-point before.

But ever since that day that the old woman had told her fortune—followed so uncannily by her memorable and never to be forgotten interview with Count Carlos Turga—she had found it exceedingly difficult to harmonize things as they were with things as they ought to be.

Most of all she clung to the impression that Count Turga loved her. It gave her a maternal interest in him, made her sympathize with his unhappiness.

Ah, Elin—and to think that only a month or so before you were strong in the faith that all unhappiness was fiction, was wrong, was immoral even!

Day after day she calmed her unusual anxiety with the promise that he would come. He came not.

Half guiltily she sought to renew her pleasant friendship with Hugh Frail—walked over to the Frail estate, as she had done on other days, trying to convince herself that she wasn't bold in doing so, that it was the natural thing for her to do, that in no wise could it be construed as a lack of faithfulness on her part so far as Carlos Turga was concerned.

One day she saw Frail. Not only saw him, but she was almost certain that he had seen her as well.

It was near the new lake. He had been standing there watching the workmen. With a little resurgence of friendliness and happiness she had started in his direction.

Something in his attitude had smitten her innocent heart like an accusation. It was almost as though she had divined his thoughts—that he felt she had deserted him. And there he was—standing there so lonely and disconsolate, in spite of his wealth and this abundant activity around him which his wealth could command. He was looking at this lake, monument that it was to the family superstition, to the family tragedies—past, present, and to come.

She started toward him, she had seen him turn and glance in her direction, then he had sauntered away. She changed her direction, walked on and on, outwardly smiling, with a stricken heart within.

Something had happened to her universe, she could not tell herself just what.

Dr. Carstairs noticed the change that had come over his daughter. Throughout the years of his widowerhood he had been preparing himself for some such situation as this. He had been telling himself all along that the time

would come when his daughter would be lost to him to some extent—when she would respond to the stronger claim of another, younger man. But it found him all unprepared.

They had always been the best of comrades. He did not hesitate to question her—only it was in a shy and delicate way.

"A hard life," he murmured with a sympathetic smile one evening when Elin was pouring his tea with more than ordinarily grave face.

She looked up quickly, guiltily, a bit frightened at the discovery that her preoccupation had been found out.

"Do fortune-tellers ever stumble onto the truth?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Very likely," he answered indulgently. His rather broad and florid face was almost indulgent when he talked to Elin. "They often stumble on the truth, no doubt; but they can never change it."

"What—the future?"

"The future—the truth. I mean that it doesn't make any difference whether your fortune-teller is a good guesser or a bad; there is never anything to worry about."

"But this is different."

"In that it concerns you and—"

"Yes, tell me."

"You and a young man."

"I'm *Dr. Watson*," she commented, with a flash of her old sprightliness.

"It doesn't take a *Sherlock Holmes* for this. One young man and one young woman—fortune-tellers have dwelt upon that since the world began."

"There were two young men," Elin amended, then bit her lip.

Dr. Carstairs laughed gently.

"One or two—or three. But two in the present case. Do you want me to tell you their names?"

"You know them."

"And the fortune-teller, too. I've often met her on my walks. She seems to be particularly thick with some of those foreign workmen young Frail has working on that lake of his."

"Does she look evil to you?"

"Not evil—just sort of wondrous wise. She looks as though she might have almost completed the circle—got back to the perfect omniscience of, let us say, the new-born infant—along with the other things that she has picked up on the way."

"Then she might be a fortune-teller?"

"She might be a corking good guesser, if that's what you mean."

"She predicted a terrible thing."

With fragments pieced together—as our grandmothers, then young, used to make their "crazy-quilts"—she managed to get out a pretty fair account of what the old woman had told her, of what had happened since then. To all of which Dr. Carstairs listened with affectionate interest.

"Lots of things in the world that we can't understand, honey," he said later on, as he kissed her good night.

"Lots of things. But you know our old rule—the best rule that was ever framed—just not to worry, just to meet every situation with old-fashioned good sense and honesty, to take everything that comes as all in a day's work."

It were sacrilege to penetrate the chaste, immaculate fragrance of Elin Carstairs's bedroom. But there she had her writing-desk. As she looked at it when she was alone her father's words came back to her about meeting each situation that came up with old-fashioned honesty.

Impulsively, she sat down and began to write a note to Turga.

She wrote and wrote, with heaven in her face, a mingling of love, both human and divine, in her blue eyes, and with a tenderness ineffable on her pink lips.

She signed it with a rushing pen, then sat immersed in sudden reverie.

Across her thought had swept a vision of Hugh Frail as she had seen him standing beside the unfinished lake—that monument to family superstition, grief, and tragedy.

The night had gone very still. It must have been almost midnight. Then the silence was broken by the distant, mournful howling of a dejected dog.

Miss Carstairs tiptoed to the window and looked out. A gibbous moon was coasting down thin clouds behind the bare branches of the trees. The moon, the year, the Frails were waning.

Elin Carstairs picked up the letter she had just written—thought of Turga, thought of Frail.

She murmured a little prayer.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE INVISIBLE HAND.

TURGA opened his eyes from a deep sleep, noted gratefully that the sun was shining and that he was feeling fit. Then, rapidly enough but by degrees, the events of the night before recurred to him.

He had found Paulo again, had drunk some wonderful wine, had heard an old musician play a hurdy-gurdy. Succeeding recollections were on him with a rush—the barriers of forgetfulness all down, the legions of memory storming in triumph.

There had been a repetition of the old nightmare, the old haunt.

The words of the song he had heard came back to him now. But they were mingled with other words—words that he had spoken to Agatha Frail when they were riding home, other words that Agatha had spoken when they were still in the restaurant.

The ghost had shown its head again. They had banded together to drive it forever out of their lives—he and Agatha, Paulo and his blond giantess of a daughter, and the amplexed, bright-eyed Mme. Zidek.

It was all arranged. Paulo and Mme. Zidek were to be married. It had almost been arranged—almost—that he and Agatha were to go and do likewise.

He was to see her that afternoon. He thought of her now with tenderness. She was certainly a very wonderful girl—complex, beautiful, just a bit dangerous—one of those feminine mixed drinks which nature prepares every now and then for a weary palate out of her billion years of experience.

A Swiss valet—polite and presentable enough, but too pale for comfort—came in with some letters on a silver tray and the verbal information that Turga's bath was waiting—"fotre panne, m'soor."

"For the love of Mike, speak English," Turga ordered, reaching for his mail.

"Your pat is retty, sair," the valet repeated obediently, with the decorum of a judge passing sentence. He had a lively sense of humor—like the majority of his kind.

"For the love of Isaac, make it German," said Turga as he tore open an envelope.

"*Ihre Bad ist fertig*—" he began.

"Oh, very well," said Turga.

With a sure hand he had first of all pulled out the one letter addressed to him in a woman's hand. It was a letter from Elin Carstairs, as he saw by a hasty reference to the signature.

Then he began again at the beginning. He couldn't quite see what she was driving at—he began to skip—he had so many other things to think about. She wasn't the girl that Agatha Frail was—not by any means.

Turga dropped the letter back into the tray for future reference, then shuffled over to the waiting bath.

The pale Swiss, left alone, began to set the room to rights. Once or twice he glanced at the open letter on the tray, caught a word or two of interest, then began to read it greedily. He was one of those who take their romance vicariously.

Turga splurged and scrubbed. Something of the courage he had felt the night before was coming back to him. After all, he was young and



healthy, this was America and the twentieth century, Agatha Frail was young and rich and beautiful. And he was to see her that afternoon.

He was to make it early—not later than two o'clock. They had agreed upon that between them. They had agreed upon so many things. They had so much in common!

He could feel again the thrilling contact of her lips, could feel the equal thrill of her eyes on his, especially in the twilight mystery of the cab when they were riding home together.

Their minds were open. Perhaps this afternoon would settle it. He was quite willing to have it settled—one way or the other, for that matter. After all, getting married didn't necessarily mean tying oneself up for life. He knew no ends of people—many of them friends of his—who had made the trip to Nevada or Dakota, and had rather enjoyed it withal.

Faultlessly dressed—the Swiss was a pearl of a valet, if he was a fool—Turga strolled out into the frosty sunshine.

He had forgotten all about the letter he had started to read. He had other things to think about—just time for a pleasant stroll up the avenue, a look into a shop or two where one was always apt to encounter a provoking smile, an exciting pair of eyes; then lunch, then his rendezvous—with all its latent possibilities. Few days had ever promised so much.

As a matter of fact, few days were ever to be so fruitful.

He had quite decided on the restaurant that was to have the honor of his patronage—an expensive, well-known restaurant where he often went, both alone and with friends of his. And he had a particular reason for going there. Several times, when he had lunched there recently, he had remarked a certain fair and alluring stranger who had also showed a partiality for the place.

These things being true, it is very odd that Turga did not even go near

the place. It was almost as though he were being led by an invisible hand—as though he were a mere infant conducted by an invisible nurse.

He loitered up the avenue, it is true, then strolled off aimlessly into one of the cross streets toward Broadway. He did not do this unconsciously. Several times he mentally warned himself to get back to the avenue, to his restaurant, to his selected program of action.

It was almost as though he were bereft of will. He walked on and on. And somehow a subtle change had come over his mood. He was no longer as gay as he had been. Several very comely young women passed him in the course of this promenade—fashionably gowned and hatted, any one of whom would have made an excellent advertisement for a beauty-parlor, and who, under ordinary circumstances, would have delighted his eye.

Turga did not see them. A sort of gray cloud had piled up athwart the sky of his spirit—a presage of possible storm, though the real day was as frostily fair as ever.

He had come to Broadway, was pausing before the entrance of a brilliant hostelry for which he had never greatly cared, was meditating the advisability of eating luncheon there instead of at that other place he had in mind.

Suddenly he stood still, the cold fingers of fear caressing his heart. He smiled, but he was weak, stricken.

Inclination and reason had told him to go back the way he had come. Instead, he went on in—forced there by inevitable fate.

Almost before he knew it, he was surrendering hat, stick, and overcoat to a uniformed flunky, and a suave head waiter was bowing him into a salmon-pink dining-room.

As if in greeting, there broke softly about him the mellifluous of a hidden orchestra—swooning, sensuous.

Through the soft glamour of sha-

ded lights he caught sight of a familiar face and figure—still very fascinating, still very beautiful, still what the French call *troubiante*. She was smiling at him.

It was the former Princess Viatka—Mrs. Frail.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### CHAMPAGNE AND CAVIAR.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Frail was looking so altogether attractive that, after the first well-concealed twinge of impatience, Turga discovered that he wasn't so unhappy, after all. There was something about that salmon-pink interior, the shaded lights, the voluptuous music, that suited the former Princess Viatka marvelously well.

She was by far too expert a ring-general, however, to show an overabundance of pleasure at the outset. Apart from that initial smile, her invitation to share her table with her, Turga found her inclined to be more reserved than usual.

He decided to use the brief time at his disposal in breaking down this reserve as far as possible. He wasn't particularly interested in the result, but it was a rather better way of killing time than anything else he could think of.

"*Kismet*," he said with a dry smile as the waiter withdrew. "I was just asking myself what in the world had brought me here. Now I know."

"The same question has been answered for me," Mrs. Frail volunteered.

"You'll forgive me if I don't sympathize with you."

"I ask no sympathy. And you?"

"I'm the luckiest man in New York," said Turga feelingly, as he quaffed a preliminary beverage known as a "Clover Club"—whatever that might be.

Over the door of the restaurant to which Turga had entered there was a large gilt dial. During a lull in the

music there floated down from this direction the silver fragment of a chime. Looking up, he saw that it was half past twelve—still an hour and a half of liberty before he would have to keep his engagement with Agatha Frail. The fact gave him an added feeling of exhilaration. Plenty of time—plenty of leeway.

Mrs. Frail had gracefully permitted him to order for her. He outdid himself, ordering with all the *savoir vivre* of a man three times his age. Only, the luncheon ordered had no very strict relationship with the physical demands of health. A taste of this and a taste of that—caviar, truffled grouse, heart of the palmetto, an ancient Burgundy, glowing black and red.

It was amazing—amazing and pleasant, too, for that matter—how quickly the time fled.

Turga glanced up at the gilt dial. One-fifteen, and only down to the salad. After all, it shouldn't prove disastrous if he were five or ten minutes late.

The leader of the orchestra was outdoing himself. He was an Ole Bull and something more. He was leading a company of Sarasates and Paderewskis, no less. The music that they were playing was the most wonderful music in the world. It seemed to be affecting everybody. They were all smiling; they were all in good humor. And, if the truth be known, they also were breaking engagements.

Not that he was going to break an engagement. Ah, no! Agatha Frail was one of the sweetest little girls in the United States. And it was easy enough to see that she had come by her charms by direct descent. Mrs. Frail was fascinating, all right.

His eyes drifted past the gilt dial as he lifted his glass. One-fifty-five. Quarter of an hour, more or less, would make no difference. He was in excellent company. Nevertheless it was perfectly true that the fête would have to end some time. There was

only one way to bring this about, and that was by drinking their happy rencontre in a glass—just one glass—of champagne.

The former Princess Viatka was perfectly willing. She had nothing more important on than an engagement with the dry-as-dust Melnik and the American lawyers of the Frail family at two-fifteen. In a lofty mirror on the wall opposite her she also could see the gilt dial.

She wasn't quite sure just what time the hands did indicate, and she wasn't going to give herself a headache trying to figure it out. The lawyers always settled things among themselves, anyway. They could do the same thing this time and send her the papers to sign—if there were any.

The champagne sparkled—cool, refreshing. Two-ten by the gilt dial. A final determination on the part of Turga that the best of friends must part.

As if by magic, a clear space had been discovered in the center of the restaurant. A slim youth and a slimmer girl appeared from nowhere—something like the magician's rabbits on the brim of a silk hat. The orchestra—composed entirely of famous musicians—had throbbed into something delightfully African.

The magician's white rabbits intertwined and began to convolve—quite as though they had both been swallowed at the same time by an invisible snake.

"I wonder if I could telephone?" Turga murmured half apologetically.

He couldn't leave just now. After all, he might have been in a taxi accident, or something like that. Agatha would be grateful—or she ought to be if she wasn't—that nothing dreadful had happened to him.

Two-twenty-five. There hadn't been anything positively fixed about the rendezvous. Besides, he had studied the psychology of women, both in books and by observation. Every one was agreed that the way to

clinch a girl's affection was by making her suffer—you know, "the more you beat her the better she be."

The Princess Viatka was holding a match for his cigarette. He steadied her hand with his, held it a moment, then pressed it to his lips. It was a public place, but a gentle spirit of good-fellowship was abroad. Instead of rebuking him, the princess had rather done otherwise, had rather pressed her dimpled knuckles forward instead of drawing them back.

With a mental "*Ouf!*" of relief, Turga looked at the gilt dial with a sort of brazen impudence. Going on three—too late to keep the engagement—too late to telephone—too late for any ordinary excuse. The only way to save the situation now was to turn it into downright tragedy, let resentment be dissolved into anxious tears.

Besides, he was delighted to discover that, apart from a sense of perfect well-being, the champagne wasn't having the slightest effect upon him. It wasn't having the slightest effect on the Princess Viatka either, except to make her younger, more scintillant, and beautiful.

After all, for a full-grown man of twenty-one there was nothing like the society of a mature woman. Kids were all right from time to time, but—

He leaned forward and locked little fingers with the princess.

"I've got an idea," he said.

The Princess Viatka invited him to proceed, with her most dazzling smile.

"We'll go some place where we can dance ourselves," said Turga.

"You're a darling!" she answered with enthusiasm. "I feel so—so darling."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

SUBURBAN, SUB ROSA.

THE day was already drawing to a close—so far as the workers were con-

cerned—but still early morning for Turga and his companion. It was very obliging of the sun to thus beat his record to the horizon.

Out of the salmon-pink interior of the restaurant into the sparkling twilight of upper Broadway, a million colored lamps continuing the festal atmosphere; even the white globes of the ordinary arc-lamps looking like mistletoe-berries in their milky whiteness.

The taxi swayed, crawled, and dashed ahead again, to the perfect indifference of those inside. After all, New York was a capital place to live in. There was always something doing, always something to see, always something new.

"I'm so delightfully frightened," said the former Princess Viatka, settling herself a little closer.

"Nothing to be afraid of," Turga consoled her.

"Oh, but I love it."

"Love what?"

"To be frightened."

He felt her arm quiver slightly under his. He could understand a temperament like that.

"Fear," he whispered, unintentionally dramatic. "I understand the thrill of it. I've had it in my life also, here lately. But different from the kind you mean."

"What kind do I mean?"

"Fear that you will be seen and criticised—fear of what people will say."

"And this fear of yours?"

"Are you afraid," he asked, with sudden intensity, "that this chauffeur of ours will smash into something, have an upset, kill us?"

"How delightful!" cried the former Princess Viatka with a shiver, but happy none the less. "Do you think he will?"

"I don't know," Turga replied steadily. "And, what's more, I don't give a—darn. And that's the attitude I've taken toward life in general."

He was speaking very softly, very

intensely, with his face close to Mrs. Frail.

"Go on," she urged softly. "Tell me what you mean."

"I mean," said Turga, "that we two—we two, particularly—are passengers in another sort of taxi-cab. Life!—somewhat dark, somewhat giddy, a sway, a crawl, a dash, a strange chauffeur, and Heaven knows what ahead."

He relieved the seriousness of what he was saying with a sardonic laugh and kissed her lightly before she could suspect his purpose. But she was attemble with interest in what he was saying. She suspected that he was holding back something.

"And you're expecting an accident?"

"And you?"

She shivered again—again nestled a little closer.

"Have you ever heard of the curse—of the curse on the family of the Frelinghuysens?" she asked softly. "Oh, somehow I never think of it except when I am with you, when I see you!"

"And an unknown chauffeur at the wheel," he repeated.

They didn't refer to the subject again. But the mutual understanding that to some extent had existed from the very first time that they had seen each other had deepened, become more intimate. There was a new element of daring, of recklessness in this outing of theirs.

The road-house stood on the edge of a wooded cliff, reached by a winding road. In the distance was the shimmer and glare and clustered constellations of the great city. Round them, as they paused on the porch, was the illimitable solemnity of night. For an abiding moment or two it was as though they two had already died, that they could look back on the world that they had just left, were about to go through the door of a new world—Valhalla. Sheol, Hades or Paradise, they knew not, nor greatly cared.

A band of negroes—drum, violin, cornet and piano, these supplemented with barbaric howls and chants—were doing their best to smother metaphysical problems in a riot of cubist chords and *tempi*.

"At any rate," the former Princess Viatka whispered to herself, "I have got rid of that cursed Frelinghuysen dollar."

She had passed alone into a room set apart for the women patrons of the place—a cigarette, a touch of powder, a dash of rouge. The brilliant yellow air was heavy with mingled perfume, rather too penetrating for the most part, but subtly intoxicating none the less. There was a general spirit of bravado among the others there, a sort of feminine dash and recklessness that quickened the former Princess Viatka's own pulse delightfully.

She smiled at herself in a long mirror. After all, she was beautiful, she told herself. She allowed one of the attendants to pencil her eyes—oh, ever so little, just the barest suspicion of a delicate green, the garish light requiring it.

As she inhaled her cigarette, she noticed a discarded newspaper lying there—the red and black page of an afternoon journal with screaming head-lines.

She glanced at it casually with idle interest, saw that a murder was proclaimed, then looked again with a slow filtration of wonder and horror.

#### MELNIK!

**Stabbed in the Back! No Clue!**

She clutched at the arms of her chair. She felt giddy—ill. Melnik murdered!

The woman attendant approached, eyebrows lifted, sympathetic.

"I think," said the former Princess Viatka, "I'll take that cocktail you suggested."

So this was the end of the Bohemian lawyer who had tampered with the affairs of the Cave-Dwellers. On him, also, had fallen the shadow of the

curse. It must be so. It couldn't be otherwise.

The attendant came back still fluttering with sympathy, but carrying the cocktail steadily enough on a tarnished tray.

"*Madame n'est pas bien?*"

Mrs. Frail took a pungent swallow. She felt better instantly. Her eyes brightened. She smiled.

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered lightly.

She finished her cocktail, looked down at the offending paper for a moment with growing disdain, then reached it with one of her small and beautifully shod feet. An exquisite spasm of pleasure thrilled through her as she felt the paper tear. She drew it closer with the sharp edge of her French heel, then trampled and tore, trampled and tore, in an ecstasy of delight.

For a moment or two she contemplated the advisability of one more cocktail. A number of the other women there were also drinking. But she saw that in their faces that caused her to desist.

Over and above the babble of conversation throbbed and boomed the distant frenzy of the negro musicians. That was quite exciting enough.

Her feet still on the torn and crumpled fragments of the newspaper, she stood up, looked at herself once more in the mirror, smiled and started for the door.

Turga was waiting for her there. He smiled at her darkly.

"*Ciel, woman,*" he laughed, "how beautiful you are!"

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### CHORDS AND DISCORDS.

WITHOUT permission, or the need of it, Turga had slipped his arm about her waist. The music was compelling. They glided into the strengthening current of dancers. It was very exciting—quite intoxicating. Even that

memory of the torn journal recording the tragic end of Dr. Melnik contributed somehow to the former Princess Viatka's elation.

She had never danced before to music like that, not precisely. But she had danced to the wild music of the *Tsiganer* throughout central Europe. And there was something about the tempestuous and freakish harmony of these present musicians which reminded her of them—which reminded her of another ball, something like this one, years ago, in Tarnopol.

The years slipped away. Emotions that had slumbered for years were awakened again. Through the atmosphere, heavy though it was with the mingled smells of perfumes, liquors, and the disquieting effluvia of the well-dressed human herd, there came the aromatic aroma of a Russian cigarette—a haunting memory.

Her eyes were brilliant, her red lips were open, she swooned lightly through the dance. Who could be smoking a cigarette like that, she wondered? But she didn't care.

Turga also was a superb dancer—on an occasion like this, with a partner like Mrs. Frail. But twice, now, he had noticed a black-bearded stranger in the fringe of onlookers at the tables.

There was something about the man that recalled the shadowy faces he had seen that night in the warehouse. In an ineffectual sort of way, he searched his memory. But he brought back nothing definite, only that uncanny, indefinable sense of impending Fate.

His arm tightened about Mrs. Frail's waist. He looked down into her face seeking some counter-charm which could dispel the obsession, increase his recklessness and courage.

She had abandoned herself to him utterly. She was as responsive to the wild music as were the primitive musicians themselves. She smiled up at him languorously. Turga's face was very close to hers. He was almost on the point of dropping his own face

yet a little closer. There were so many people on the floor that there was a certain element of seclusion.

Then some sense of being looked at caused him to glance again in the direction of the onlookers. Again his eyes rested upon the man with the black beard. But it was not he, Turga, who was being looked at—not just then, at any rate—the stranger had half-started from his chair, was gazing with passionate surprise at Mrs. Frail.

Turga felt an inrush of fresh uneasiness. So this was the thing that he had been suspecting! He had been dancing—dancing in the dark, in his sleep, had felt the imminence of the precipice, and it was this.

Only a glance was necessary. That the man knew Mrs. Frail there was no doubt. Striking in appearance though she was, no mere stranger would have started like that at sight of her.

Turga had brought her to the other side of the room. There he paused, his arm still about her.

"Have we had enough?" he whispered.

"No, no!" she murmured. "It's superb—wonderful! Let us go on. I love it."

"There is some one here. I feel—I'm uneasy."

"Some one here?"

Mrs. Frail cast a quick glance about.

"Some one we know—some one of our sort?"

"A man with a black beard—he looked at you so strangely."

Mrs. Frail hesitated. Her imagination brought again that faint whiff of the Russian cigarette. But she was undismayed—quite the contrary. Could it be possible that some old admirer of hers was here in this outlandish place? Her intuition at times amounted to almost a sixth sense.

Without speaking, her hand again sought Turga's arm and she swayed him impellingly once more into the rhythm of the black musicians. It



was the very quintessence of enjoyment to dance with this handsome youth before the eyes of a possible rival. To inspire jealousy again—what could equal that?

Again they circled the floor. But Mrs. Frail made no effort to see who it was that Turga referred to. Her eyes were all for Turga himself. She was more languorous and lissom than ever. One more element had been added to her delight.

And this time even Turga failed to notice the stranger. His attention had been suddenly absorbed by a youth who, for some reason or other, was exceedingly awkward in steering his companion across the crowded floor. Turga did his best to avoid a collision. Too late!

As Mrs. Frail recovered herself from the shock she found herself looking into the amazed, incredulous face of her son.

Hugh Frail stared and stared. His face had been flushed from much exercise and numerous libations. But his color gradually faded.

He turned to Turga. For a moment they stood there facing each other with the other dancers on the floor elbowing and zigzagging around them.

"What—what are you doing here?" Frail asked thickly.

Before Turga could answer, a frightful discord brought a sudden period to the clamor from the orchestra. There was a moment of terrifying silence, then a fresh clamor broke out, during which the lights went out.

There followed a greater cacophony than ever—a medley of shrieks and yells, of laughter and curses, in all of which there was but one articulate word.

The word was "police!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### FREDERIC GETS A JOLT.

As brilliantly as this momentous day had dawned for Count Carlos

Turga, it had dawned more brilliantly still for the junior member of the firm of Graw & Graw. For Frederic awoke with a sense of work well done and a day of rest ahead. It was almost as though he were a little kid again, he told himself, that this was Saturday with a day's sport ahead on his grandfather's farm.

Quite to his surprise work had proved to be a tonic, not the slightest bother in the world. But none the less he had decided to follow his father's suggestion and knock off this day at any rate.

As was usually the case when he was feeling more than ordinarily fit, Graw's thought turned to Agatha Frail. He had been thinking a good deal about Agatha here of late, nor had these thoughts been entirely complacent.

But as he swung down the Avenue, he reflected that any fears he might have had with regard to Agatha were rather absurd. Surely, Agatha could never marry any one else.

His own grandfather had been one of the few friends of the original Frail—the fugitive Count von Frelinghuysen. His father had been one of the companions who shared the stormy youth of Agatha's father.

And almost as far back as he could remember, until very recently, both families seemed to have taken it as a matter of common accord that some day he and Agatha would be happily married—to the satisfaction of all.

But young Graw knew well enough that a change had taken place. It was with a certain amount of wonder that his brain had recorded the events of that day when he had driven Agatha out to Cherry Hills in his motor-car—when he had noticed for the first time her partiality for Turga.

He was just a trifle stupefied at the possibility of Agatha being seriously interested in any one else. At first he had put it down to a passing whim. Agatha was famous for her whims.

But that she should have elected

Turga was the most whimsical thing of all. Turga was all right, but he wasn't quite normal—normal as to family, and all that sort of thing. He was too much of a mystery, too much of a foreigner—a foreigner still, despite his long residence in the United States.

"Hello, Chivvers," he greeted the Frail butler with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. "Miss Agatha in?"

"A fine day, sir," Chivvers volunteered. "I really don't know. I'll see, sir."

"Quit your kidding," said Freddy lightly. "Tell her she's got to be in."

Chivvers permitted a smile to flicker dutifully on his shaven mask.

"I'll see, sir."

Frederic lit a cigarette and strolled over to look at the tapestry. He had looked at the tapestry perhaps a thousand times before, but it always interested him. He had never been able to puzzle out how people could attach such inordinate value to pictures so hideous. They would have been bad enough in oil, let alone picked out in woolen threads.

There was a soft step behind him. He whirled delighted. He had recognized it.

"Agatha, by all the gods!" he exclaimed. "You're looking positively stunning."

Chivvers cast upon the young pair a single glance of paternal commendation. Graw noticed the glance.

"You're a brick, Chivvers," he said.

"Going to remember you in my will, be deuced if I don't." He let his adoring eyes rest again on Agatha. "What's on?" he wanted to know. But he answered his own question. "Nothing. Come along with me. I'll run you out into the country. We'll make a day of it—all by ourselves—have a bully time."

Agatha smiled upon him tenderly. She was so happy that she wouldn't willingly have hurt a fly—least of all, this big, good-natured, and fairly good-looking boy who stood in front of

her. Turga was coming—coming at two o'clock.

"You're a perfect dear," she conceded; "but it can't be done."

"I'll take you, anyway," said Graw, making a playful little move as though he intended to grab her.

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Agatha. "If you're not going any place in particular—as I know you're not; you never are—I'll let you stay here for luncheon. I'm all alone. My beloved mother is off shopping or something. But you'll have to go at one-thirty sharp."

"Ah, gee, that's only two hours at the outside. Make it two-thirty."

"At two," said Agatha, with perfect solemnity, "my dressmaker is coming—a dreadful person."

Graw drew a rueful face.

"A him or a her?" he wanted to know.

"Insolent!"

Agatha had caught his hand in hers—as she was wont to do years ago, when he had come over for a day's frolic. Perhaps it was a memory of those other days that recurred to her now.

"And I'll have them serve our luncheon up in the nursery," she added playfully.

They had come to the upper landing of the grand staircase—a most shadowy and churchlike place. Courage was now running stronger through Graw's veins than ever before. Agatha, still leading him by the hand, was a little in front of him—graceful, slight, infinitely inviting.

Obedient to a sudden and uncontrollable impulse, he caught her in his arms, swayed her lightly backward, and kissed her fervently on chin and temple.

Agatha was so startled that for a moment or two she couldn't speak. She had torn herself free, not so much from any distaste she had for such conduct as from some native instinct of self-protection.

She stood quivering with excite-

ment, her face illumined, her lips smiling and tremulous, an extraordinary light in her eyes.

"Why, Fred Graw!"

Graw stood in front of her, trembling, confused. All of his splendid courage had been expended in that one magnificent attack. He had never felt so wholly abashed and frightened in his life.

He tried to speak—tried to laugh—succeeded in nothing but chattering his teeth. For him the hour was a solemn one.

Suddenly Agatha's expression changed, relaxed, as did her tense, young figure. She was shaking with laughter. Gale after gale of laughter, rollicking, surcharged with merriment, swept over her, brought the tears to her eyes, made her squirm.

There was only one thing in the world that could have increased Graw's fear—it was not her anger, which he believed he had already felt—and that was her ridicule.

"Stop your laughing," he managed to say.

Agatha caught the meaning of the intonation. She continued to laugh, and there was an element of cruelty in it. She had suddenly discovered that she could make some one suffer. The discovery pleased her, gave her a hitherto untasted thrill of excitement.

"Stop it, I say!" Graw reiterated, his dismay turning into anger.

Agatha's laugh turned into something perilously like a sneer.

"And since when did you get the right to give me orders?" she wanted to know.

He recovered himself somewhat, smiled awkwardly, took a step in her direction.

She drew back slightly, still looking at him with sparkling eyes. It was too good an opportunity to lose. She had another barbed shaft already on the cord.

"Go on," she said. "While you're about it, order me to break that engagement as well."

Graw looked at her in silence while the watch in his pocket ticked off thirty seconds.

"With Turga?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Mr. Graw. Won't you stay?"

"I'm sorry I can't stay," he said.

As he passed Chivvers in the lower hall he was ostensibly humming a tune.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

"NEVER SAY DIE."

FREDERIC GRAW, 3RD, still humming—ostensibly—turned into Central Park. It was an ideal day for the equestrians, and there were many of them out. For a moment or two he half determined to go and get his own mount. He must be nervous and out of sorts, he told himself, or he never would thus have flown off the handle.

But even this indirect way of reverting to the incident from which he had just emerged brought him a little pang of self-pity. By the same token the mere thought of being jogged up and down into anything resembling physical activity became abhorrent. A little while before the very atmosphere was tingling with the zest of life. Now he kept quoting:

"The melancholy days have come—"

He could get no further, nor cared to. Those few words expressed sufficiently his whole outlook on life.

But before he had been there very long, only half noticing the stream of cavaliers and amazons, his attention was awakened by a horseman mounted on a skittish, young thoroughbred filly—such a queen of an animal that, perforce, Graw thought again of Agatha.

She quivered at every dead leaf that fluttered down—the filly did—showed an incessant readiness to bolt. There was slumbering fire in her beautiful eyes, revolt in her quivering flanks and every toss of her finely chiseled head.

The man on her back gave no heed. He was a picture of masterful dignity—calm, self-possessed, thoroughly sure of himself. But to Graw's trained and admiring eyes it was obvious that the filly recognized the master. She had learned the strength of his hand, had yielded the higher will. He could see what might easily have happened had a feebler spirit tried to dominate her.

Again he thought of Agatha—skittish, young, a thoroughbred. He flushed a little, but it was for himself, not her. He straightened up, looked again at the rider who had just passed, and at sight of that strong back, commanding shoulders, the proud carriage of the head, felt his own muscles become taut, a fierce uprising of his own latent courage.

For a moment he stood there, breathing deep the cool, invigorating air. He turned and retraced his steps.

"Back again, sir?" asked Chivvers dutifully, although the question was manifestly absurd.

"Back again," he answered. "Has Miss Frail gone out?"

"I'll see, sir."

"Tell her I must see her—must. Got that?"

A mellow chime from somewhere in the interior of the house was announcing three o'clock. Graw had lunched in solitary melancholy. There was a little twinge of melancholy now as he thought how he and Agatha might have had their luncheon together, as she had suggested, up in the nursery, as in the days of old.

Then he remembered what she had said about her two o'clock engagement, and again the militant spirit rose strong within him.

It might not have been with Turga. He knew Agatha well enough for that. But if it was Turga—

"Miss Frail isn't feeling very well, sir," Chivvers reported, "and would like to know, sir, if there is any word."

"Only one word, Chivvers," said Graw, "and that is that I want to see

her, must see her—if only for a moment," he added, as a slight concession to diplomacy.

When Chivvers came back the next time he brought with him a slight smile. Graw was practically a member of the family, anyway.

"And she's in an awful humor," he whispered.

Graw returned the smile, but kept his own counsel.

He found Agatha standing in the center of her own little drawing-room. She was standing very straight. Her fists were clenched. She was scowling, but there was abundant evidence that she had recently been crying.

"What do you want?" she asked with brutal directness.

Graw had paused, was sizing up the situation. Neither did he waste any breath on circumlocution.

"You!"

The answer came like a shot. Like a shot Agatha Frail received it. For a moment or two she was too surprised to speak.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I mean what I said—I want you."

Graw had started forward. Agatha drew back in a way which had never theretofore failed to command respect, not to say fear. Her eyes glowed. Her nostrils were dilated.

"Don't—don't you try that again!" she panted. "Don't you dare touch me!"

She was reminding Graw more than ever of that skittish, thoroughbred filly—aquiver, ready to kick, insurgent. He himself was not without experience so far as the breed was concerned. He had passed most of his youth hanging about the stables of his father's country-place—had absorbed a good deal of the strategy that an occasion like this demanded.

Almost cautiously, yet kindly, steadily, without the slightest outward sign of trepidation, he went forward, his hand on her shoulder. Before she could again draw back he had clasped her in his arms.

The victory wasn't an altogether simple thing. Nor had he expected it to be. He knew that Chivvers hadn't lied about her humor, and with her humors, of one sort and another, he had had a long experience.

She freed one hand and struck him across the side of his face. He hardly winced; reached up and pinioned this hand again with unshaken complacency.

"Let me go!" Agatha gritted between clenched teeth. "Let me go, I tell you, or I'll shriek!"

Graw didn't answer—merely tightened his hold, merely swayed her back a little so that her eyes met his. She was throwing every iota of her strength into her struggles, but she could scarcely move.

"I hate you!" she hissed.

"Oh, no, you don't," he replied softly.

His hold had not relaxed. Agatha had left off struggling, but he could tell from the feel of her lithe body that she would seize the first opportunity to escape. She wasn't mastered yet.

"Oh, no, you don't," he repeated just as softly.

"Coward!"

In a way the epithet was an acknowledgment of weakness on her part.

He smiled down at her indulgently.

"Why don't you laugh at me?" he asked.

She didn't answer. In the depth of her eyes he could see some slight indication of change.

"And where is that Mr. Turga you were talking about?" he wanted to know.

There was a final flare of volcanic light in the depth of Agatha's eyes; then quite unexpectedly the fire was quenched with a sudden mist. He felt her body relax.

"Poor little kid!" Graw murmured almost paternally. "Poor little kid!"

The mist, repeating a phenomenon common in nature, became rain.

The mellow chime was again ringing. As Graw listened it seemed incredible that an hour had passed so swiftly—equally incredible that such a stupendous change had taken place in such a short time.

"I'll do anything in the wide, wide world that you ask me to," he murmured softly. "Only I'm boss."

"You're boss," whispered Agatha, with her hand on his cheek, "and these are your orders—orders that you give, you know."

"Sure—anything you say," Graw laughed.

"Since that beloved mother of mine has seen fit to remain away," said Agatha, "you don't want me to stay in this big, old house all alone. It's to be dinner in a bright, big restaurant; then afterward—"

"Then afterward?"

"Then afterward, oh, something desperate—something wild—a dance in a country road-house."

"Sure! I know just the place."

"Where we'll get excitement," insisted Agatha.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE SCENE OF EXCITEMENT.

THEY were headed for excitement enough, were Graw and Agatha—had they only known it—a little later, as, like the pair of young sweethearts that they were, they held hands in the cushioned obscurity of an automobile headed north.

The long truce, which had permitted the proprietor of the road-house in question to do pretty much as he wished, and to let his guests do pretty much as they wished, was broken.

The police had descended like a twofold curse of locusts and darkness. And Egypt was smitten hard.

As darkness fell on Turga, on Mrs. Frail and her son, there was at first a surge as if everybody there were trying to move in one direction—a herd of panicky sheep.

There was a crash of glass—another and still wilder stampede in that direction, dominated this time by the stentorian voice of authority. At one end of the hall a single gas-jet quivered into light, and again the crowd fell silent.

It was spectral, uncanny—a vision of pale faces petrified with fear in the midst of merriment. A hysterical woman let out a falsetto laugh; and again the noise broke out, only this time more subdued, more easily dominated by the voice of some officer or other giving orders.

"All you gents and ladies stand still just where you are, and nothing will happen to you."

In a general way the order was being obeyed. Other gas-jets were flaring up one at a time, then with a sort of noiseless rush the electric lights were on again and once more the place was brilliantly illuminated.

Already the process of evacuation was under way. At one end of the hall there was a little knot of policemen maintaining order and taking names, while the recent revelers filed out singly and in groups, giving names and addresses—real or fictitious, it mattered not.

It was the only way out. At the other end of the hall and at each window, wherever one cared to look, there were glimpses of other uniforms.

Young Frail had turned on Turga with fierce desperation.

"Where is my mother?" he demanded.

Turga looked from left to right in amazement. Apart from the strangers round them they were alone.

"Your mother—where is she?" he gasped in turn.

"Where is she?" Frail repeated.

There was something of panic in his voice. He was looking at Turga out of round eyes. His mouth was open and his lower lip was aquiver.

Mrs. Frail was nowhere to be seen. They looked all round them. The

young lady with whom Frail had been dancing but a minute before, feeling keenly their present lack of attention to her presence, murmured something uncomplimentary and started in the direction of the exit.

"Perhaps Mrs. Frail has gone out," Turga suggested.

"Of course she's gone out!" Frail blurted with growing hysteria. "What did you mean by bringing her here?"

"Calm yourself," Turga replied, though he himself was far from being calm. "Everything will be all right. She's here. We'll find her."

"But where?"

Frail was again staring at Turga, maudlin, fish-eyed. For a moment or two he struggled to get out the words that were trembling on his quivering lower lip.

"By the Lord, Turga," he ejaculated, "you got her into this, and you got to get her out!"

Frail's nerves were steadily becoming worse. Turga ignored the charge, looked about him with an assumption of coolness.

"And you got me into it, too," Frail continued with almost a sob. "You dirty pup, if you hadn't butted in with Elin Carstairs I shouldn't have been here."

He paused, aghast at his own audacity. Plainly, he had said something that he hadn't intended to say—one of those things that a man keeps in his heart until it springs forth in defiance of his will.

But Turga received his declaration with cool disdain.

"Shut up!" he said. "We've got other troubles—here, now."

The hall was becoming rapidly emptied.

There was no longer any doubt about it. Mrs. Frail was not there. About the only hope which remained was that, in some manner, she had been among the first to get out; that they would find her perhaps in the motor-park or on the porch.

It would do no good to ask the



blue-coated registrars at the door. Both of them knew that a woman of Mrs. Frail's position and experience would give any name but her own.

Out in the open air they stumbled round in the ever present confusion, hating each other yet sticking together—leashed up by a common anxiety.

There was light enough outside, but they knew their quest was hopeless. Even had Mrs. Frail succeeded in getting out by herself in that first descent of darkness and panic, she would have had to be an extraordinary woman indeed to find the taxicab or the chauffeur that had brought her.

Frail discontinued to whine like a discontented, ill-bred child.

Turga was becoming instantly more somber.

They had made their way to the parking-space. Automobiles were honking and coughing all around them. Their overworked nerves were kept perpetually on the jump. They were in imminent danger of being run down.

"I tell you to shut up!" Turga grated as he suddenly turned and confronted Frail.

They had come into a place full of confusing lights and shadows—a lugubrious place, in some way as chaotic and disordered as their own thought.

"I won't shut up!" Frail cried. "It's your fault. Everything is your fault—you dirty—"

Before he could finish the sentence Turga had swung a smashing blow to his face.

Frail reeled back, as much dazed by the suddenness of the assault as he was by the force of it. He was completely sobered now. As far back as he could remember no one had ever struck him before. The horror of it was not sudden; it was gradual. His brain required time—only a few moments, but it seemed longer—to fully note the fact and all the attendant circumstances.

There in the darkness, with the discordant thunder of motor-horns, of barking engines and excited voices around him—a darkness shot to pieces by the blinding flare of headlights—it wasn't so much a man that he saw before him as it was a personification of all that was evil and brutal and dangerous in his own life.

It was not Turga—it was the thing that had robbed him of the only girl he had ever loved; that had dragged his mother into this inferno, and had now awakened him to a full realization of the wretched pass into which his life was drifting by a blow on the face.

Turga was still standing there in an attitude of watchfulness as Frail recovered himself and stepped forward.

It was Turga who spoke.

"Keep away from me," he commanded. "Keep away from me and keep silent. If you insult me again—"

Frail hadn't spoken. He was swifter and steadier than Turga could have suspected him of being, and as Frail struck out Turga was taken almost unawares.

He sought to sidestep, to parry.

Then, just as Frail landed, an automobile rushed by.

Turga had felt a hideous impact—a deluge of pain.

The mud-guard had caught him in the back, had hurled him into the dust.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AN ECHO FROM MUSCOVY.

NEVER in her life had the former Princess Viatka enjoyed such a thrill of fear and excitement as when the lights went out. A strange place, a strange crowd, strange perils! To her jaded nerves the situation was perfect.

An instant later, while the excitement was still on its upward rush, an arm had slipped under her own, a voice had whispered in her ear the one word "Come!"

Mrs. Frail, as she looked back on the incident later, remembered that the voice was strange, that the word was spoken in her native Russian. At the time she noticed neither of these things, merely obeyed automatically.

There wasn't time to think during that swift, brutal rush through the darkness, through the surging, invisible crowd. Followed a crash of glass as a window went out. They were in the open air.

Two policemen rounded a corner of the building, but before they could get their bearings Mrs. Frail, still obedient to the urging arm locked in hers, was across a narrow footpath and behind a mass of ornamental shrubbery. She and her escort stood there crouching, like hunted animals, until the sportsmen of the law had passed.

Not until then did she take note of the fact that the man who had steered her to the open air was neither Turga nor her son. He was a stranger. But even here in the darkness she sensed his lithe strength and somehow his station in life. He hadn't released his hold on her arm, and as she attempted to draw back he held her more tightly than ever.

"Who are you?" she demanded softly in Russian.

The stranger laughed.

"The Princess Viatka has a short memory," he said. "I recognized her the moment that she came into the room."

Mrs. Frail again felt the eery delight of fear—the unnameable thrill of the child who asks with chattering teeth for one more ghost-story. There was a familiar echo in the voice—an echo of her own far Muscovy.

"Who are you?" she repeated.

"What do names matter?"

A note of impatience had crept into the stranger's voice—just a hint of latent cruelty.

For a fraction of a second the former Princess Viatka flashed a look into her jungly past. She had broken many hearts in the old days—she

could not recall the fact even now without a secret sense of triumph; many men had crossed her path. This was one of them. Beyond that, she was still in doubt.

Before she could formulate further question or protest, her self-elected escort attempted to force her again to follow as he led the way. She drew back with a movement of revolt.

"Come," he flamed fiercely. "I've got you this far. You needn't think that you're going to get away from me now. Come! I've my motor over there. You're coming with me."

"I'm not coming with you!"

Mrs. Frail had snatched her arm away, but before she could take a step her captor again had her by the wrist, had jerked her toward him roughly that for a moment she was deprived of the power of speech.

"I'll scream!"

But the words lacked something of sincerity. They contained more of pleading than of threat. And even so that note of delicious dread could not altogether be concealed.

Again the stranger had laughed. He had thrown a strong arm about her waist, was almost carrying her as he hurried forward, by a circuitous route to where he had left his automobile.

They passed through a rift of brilliant light cast by an arc-lamp between the shadows of the trees. There the stranger paused, looked down at his captive. His eyes glowed. His white teeth gleamed through his black beard as he smiled.

"Sergius!" she gasped.

"Yea, my little Olga, it is Sergius," he replied. "I'm glad that your memory is not so short as I feared it was. I have never ceased to love you. Thought of you has been my consolation in the cold, white hell of Siberia—in Saghalien. If it hadn't been for you—and yet, it was because of you."

A spasm of pain swept across his face. He lifted a clenched hand above

her face, poised it there tensely as if he could have slain her with a blow, as though he had determined to do so. He kissed her instead.

The former Princess Viatka shuddered, half swooned.

"I'm glad, at least," said Sergius exultantly, "that your husband is dead."

"Michel killed him."

"Good business. If it hadn't been for that, I might not have come to America. I only got here a week or so ago—thought I would give you up, perhaps, after all. The fates decreed otherwise—sent me up this afternoon to this jamboree—I saw you—all the old fires flamed up again. I was just back of you when the lights went out."

"You said—the death of my husband—what did that have to do with your coming here?"

Sergius whispered:

"Have you forgot the Frelinghuyesen curse—the Cave-Dwellers?"

The former Princess Viatka trembled slightly.

"And now?"

"And now!"

There was another gleam of white teeth through the black beard, but it could hardly have been called a smile. His arm tightened about her. He again started forward.

"Stop struggling," he commanded. "Don't be a fool. You could be sent to the police court—or an asylum."

As one who is borne along in a nightmare the former Princess Viatka traversed another brief interval of glimmer and gloom, found herself at the polished door of a limousine. Dismayed, incapable of coherent thought, bereft almost of reason and of will, she yielded herself to an innate fatalism.

There was a purring throb of machinery, a lurch, the car padded forward.

They had entered a smooth but illy lighted road. The car gained speed.

From time to time Sergius laughed again. He still held her tightly—and

in the clasp of his strong arms, as well as that laugh of his, the former Princess Viatka knew that there was as much cruelty as passion.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Let the future take care of itself," he purred. "This is enough."

He pressed her face to his and held it there. She had ceased to struggle, ceased to resist. She felt like a little child in the presence of this strong man. She was completely under his domination.

"And you love me still?" she breathed.

"Love you and hate you," he answered, holding her away from him, but still gripping her hard. "I have not decided yet whether or not to make you my queen or to kill you."

She had uttered a little cry of pain. He was hurting her. Then his cruel grip relaxed and he was all tenderness again.

"To cherish or to slay," he echoed.

"Either—from you," she sighed.

It was as though she were young again—young and back in southern Russia. *Dieu!* How she suffered! How happy she was!

Whither?

They were rushing through the night. It was as though the chauffeur had absorbed something of the daredevil spirit of his master—reckless, careless of the future, dashing lawless through the night.

The car swayed.

There was a tremendous, cataclysmic inrush of noise.

Mrs. Frail was hurled through space—oh, an illimitable distance!

It was horrible, wonderful—death perhaps!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### ON THE DARK ROAD.

CRAW's own chauffeur had done his best to avoid a collision, but the other automobile was on the wrong side of

the road and going fast, had swerved at the last moment. They were on the last lap of their journey to the road-house when the accident occurred. After the first crashing tumult they discovered that neither of them had been hurt—not even cut by the shattered glass.

Graw forced open a door of the limousine and he and Agatha were out on the road. There was another automobile there. It was easy to see that it was upon this machine had fallen the brunt of the accident.

There was a simultaneous cry. There was a woman in the road, unconscious, her face revealed in the cold glare of an unbroken headlight.

"My mother!" gasped Agatha.

"Great Lord!" Graw moaned.

Even then it was not so much the fact that Mrs. Frail was there before them injured—mortally, perhaps—that filled him with dismay, as it was the fact that the accident should have occurred here, at such a time and such a place. He felt the added horror of imminent publicity and scandal.

Agatha had stooped down, was tearing off her gloves with some idea of rendering effective aid.

Graw had thrown a quick glance about him in a first desperate hope of salvation from some one, somewhere.

Out of the chaos appeared a dark-bearded stranger, hatless, both blood and dust on his handsome face. With a muttered exclamation which might have been either prayer or curse, the stranger had likewise discovered the form of Mrs. Frail, had knelt down beside her. Agatha had been brushed aside.

For a moment both she and Graw were so surprised, so completely had all their ordinary judgments been upset by what had just happened, that they sought neither to protest nor explain, nor even demand an explanation.

The stranger had moved his hand lightly over Mrs. Frail's forehead, had felt her wrist.

"Is she badly hurt?" asked Graw, breathless.

It was as though the stranger had not heard him.

For a moment longer Graw and Agatha continued to look at the group in the road. Then Graw touched the man on the shoulder.

"Tell me," he commanded. "Are you a doctor?"

With a decided foreign accent the stranger replied that he was not. A moment later he had leaped to his feet. Another automobile was coming along. It happened to be a taxicab with no one in it. There was a brief parley.

Graw and Agatha were still hovering over Mrs. Frail when the stranger returned. They themselves had scarcely recovered from the shock of the accident, were still incapable of efficient action.

It was otherwise with the stranger. Without a word to them he lifted Mrs. Frail in his arms.

"What are you going to do?" "Where are you going?" Their questions were simultaneous.

The stranger threw them a quick scowl. At first he seemed to be on the point of refusing to answer, then to have thought better of it.

"She's hurt," he answered brusquely. "I take her to a hospital."

His audacity so amazed them that he had taken several steps toward the waiting taxi before either of them thought to interfere.

Agatha's small hand gripped Graw's arm. He sprang forward.

"We'll go with you," he said at the stranger's shoulder.

The man with the black beard neither turned nor hesitated nor spoke a word.

Graw felt an instant rush of panicky anger. He had caught one of the victim's limp hands in his.

The stranger had turned with a muttered curse of impatience.

"Let go," he commanded.

"Who are you?" Graw asked.

"None of your business."

The stranger had again turned. They were almost at the side of the waiting taxi. He was walking faster.

Behind him Graw heard the small voice of Agatha bidding him not to let the stranger take her mother away. He leaped forward as a horse leaps at the jab of a rowel. A strong and very eager hand had grabbed the stranger's collar at the instant peril of further catastrophe.

The stranger had already made a move to put down his burden, to fight off the intruder. There was murderous rage in his face as he turned.

Just then Graw received a welcome reinforcement.

"Take care of *madame*—I take care of *heem*!"

It was August, Graw's chauffeur—a most disordered and villainous-looking August, with a cut over one eye, capless, coat torn. But he carried a wrench in his hand. There was no question about his continued efficiency so far as a fight was concerned.

With a quick movement Graw had passed his own arms about Mrs. Frail's body, just as that lady opened her eyes.

She, as well as Graw, perhaps, had a confused glimpse of a grimy paw seizing the black beard, of a whirling wrench as the fight began.

Then Graw had thrust Mrs. Frail into the taxicab, had helped Agatha in.

He turned to give August a hand. At first it was impossible; after that it wasn't necessary.

The combatants were down. There was a tremendous writhing of interlocked bodies, then August appeared on top.

He had dropped his wrench, but both of his hands were engaged under the black beard.

Graw bent over them. Close to his August lifted an exultant face.

"*Moi*, I triumph. You go—take *madame et mademoiselle*. Other automobiles come—scandal! Go quick!"

It was sound advice. August was right. There was no doubt about that.

Graw threw a quick look round him. He saw the chauffeur of the stranger's car still sitting in the middle of the road, where he had been thrown, wholly absorbed in studying the state of his own injuries. He could hear other cars coming from the direction of town. There would soon be help for all concerned.

A moment later he was in the taxi, had slammed the door shut.

Stimulant—a good, stiff drink!

The driver of the taxi was no doctor, but he knew something about first aid in matters of this kind. He had swung his car round, had made a quick dash toward the road-house. He was just on the edge of the parking-space, and had taken note of the extraordinary confusion there, when a disfigured young man tottered out of the disordered gloom directly in his path.

By the quickest sort of action he was just able to avoid running over him. Even as it was, he had to swing his car round at the imminent risk of an upset.

The maneuver had brought the youth to the taxicab door.

Dazed, a good deal like one in a delirium, he gazed in. It was Hugh Frail.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE MASTER-MIND.

THERE was a family reunion, not only there and then in the taxicab, but later on, in the damask seclusion of Mrs. Frail's boudoir. That lady had refused to permit them to call a physician. She had even refused to risk herself again within the portals of the road-house. A little nervous, a little headachy—and that was all.

She had given a not altogether convincing version of her having been kidnapped by the dark-bearded stranger,

She wasn't sufficiently recovered yet to master all the details of it—hand on her heart, repeated use of her smelling-salts, *eau-de-cologne* on her temples.

"And Turga took you up there?" Graw asked, with his eyes on Mrs. Frail.

He himself had brusquely announced the fact of his engagement to Agatha, had assumed a seat in the family council on the strength of it. The seat happened to be a Louis XVI chair, which appeared much too slender for his robust weight.

His blond hair made his face glow with a bloom of health that was almost arrogant. He dominated the situation.

There had sprung into his heart and mind something of that spirit which had helped him to dominate Agatha earlier in the day. The situation, as he saw it, was analogous—a skittish and factious family, if ever there was one, in need of a strong and gentle hand.

"My poor child," sighed Mrs. Frail, "what a tone you take!"

"I'm sure I don't want to take a tone," he said, refusing to be put off. "But you'll admit that it's a bit thick of him. Personally, I think that we have seen quite enough of this Turga person—we, all of us."

"You mean?" Mrs. Frail asked.

"I mean," Graw answered stoutly, "that we've got to cut him out—you, Agatha, Hugh, all of us."

He sat very straight. His neck swelled out a little. His lower jaw came out. His eyes met Mrs. Frail's unflinchingly.

"Count me in," cried Agatha eagerly.

She had listened with passionate interest to her brother's own version of how he himself had chastised Turga. It had brought out all that she possessed of sisterly tenderness, had sent her over to the arm of his chair. Hugh found it all highly flattering.

There was a glitter in Agatha's eyes.

The way that Turga had failed to keep his appointment with her that afternoon still rankled.

"I never liked him," she lied vindictively. "I never want to see him again."

Unhesitatingly, Graw stalked over, turned back her face and kissed her on the lips.

Mrs. Frail started up, unconcealed admiration in her eyes and voice.

"Oh, what a czar!" she cried. "Oh, what a master-mind!"

Graw kissed her also.

A little later Agatha met her brother in the hall, whither she had gone to bid her new hero a more intimate farewell. For the second time that night she put her arms round Hugh's neck, kissed him with unaccustomed affection.

"Oh, I'm so glad—so glad!"

Hugh was touched.

There was really a whole untapped lake of affection in the bottom of his heart.

"I'm glad you're glad, sissy," he said. "Freddy will make a good husband for you."

"Oh, I didn't mean about that," said Agatha. "I mean I'm so glad that you struck Turga."

"Struck him?" said Hugh. He let his voice fall. "Why, Agatha, I'm afraid the son-of-a-gun got it even worse than I intended. He got not only what I handed him, but he was also side-swiped by the mud-guard of a passing auto."

Again Agatha kissed him in a transport of grateful affection.

Oh, dreadful night—dreadful and yet delicious!

Mrs. Frail, alone in her bedroom, looked at herself in the mirror. She was still beautiful—there was no doubt about that—even now, with her hair down and brushed back ready for the night.

She wondered that Sergius had not also found her so. He must have—to have acted like that. How handsome he was—handsome and brutal!



She bared one of her ivory arms and contemplated a greenish bruise, again smiled at her reflection, then shuddered.

All sorts of complications might result. What if the thing should get into the papers—a vulgar riot in such a place!

She thought of Turga. She was perfectly willing to uphold Graw's ban—she had seen Turga smile at that outrageous painted person on the dancing-floor. And thought of Turga, even more than her adventure with Sergius, recalled the family curse, the hideous nightmare of the *Frelinghuysen thaler*.

She shuddered slightly as she recalled how the marked dollar had burned her neck just there—she touched the place—while she was standing here in front of the mirror as she was now; how she had hurled it through the window, listened, but could not hear it fall.

It was an uncanny thing—that winged dollar. She thanked some pagan spirit of her superstitious youth that she had got rid of it.

Idly she drew open a drawer of the dressing-table.

She started back as though a viper had been hidden there.

Horror crept into her eyes. She was rigid.

She felt an impulse to flee, but couldn't.

Lying there in the drawer—sinister, unmistakable, every mark and scratch of it already engraved in her brain—lay the coin itself.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### CHIVERS MAKES A SLIP.

MRS. FRAIL had recovered herself sufficiently to light one of her favorite Bosnian cigarettes. Now that the first shock of the thing was past, she was rather enjoying it. She still looked at the dollar.

Once or twice she had even put out her tapering fingers to touch it, then

drawn back again. It wasn't exactly fear. Like a good many people who believe in magic of one sort or another, she was constantly on the outlook for proof in support of that belief. Here was such proof as even she had never hoped to have.

Finally she did touch the coin. It was there. It didn't disappear at her touch like a ghost.

Finally she picked it up, but she kept it in front of her. She didn't want to give it another chance to burn her. She studied it for a long time, recalling again all that she knew of its history and of the history of other *thalers*.

The thing did carry bad luck with it—did carry a curse. Ready made, she had an explanation now for everything which that day had befallen her and hers. Then her eyes narrowed slightly, her nostrils distended. It was the Marquise de Brinvilliers which was uppermost in her nature.

Under stress of her new inspiration she pawed about in one drawer after another until she discovered a small box just large enough to contain the dollar. Going over to her writing-desk, she made a package of it, sealed it carefully, and addressed it to Count Carlos Turga.

She jumped as her finger touched the hot wax and her heart pounded with a quicker pulsation.

The maid, Gabrielle, had not yet undressed, though her mistress had dismissed her for the night some time previously. Her eyebrows arched when the bell summoned her; she murmured a Gallic *sacré* something or other; but she was all smiles when she appeared in the doorway.

"Sorry, Gabrielle," said the former Princess Viatka, "but here is something which must be mailed to-night."

"*Oui, madame!*"

"Without fail."

"*Oui, madame!*"

"And I'll give you—give you—this."

Mrs. Frail had found a ring orna-

mented with a single pearl, which she knew her maid had long admired.

"Ah, *que madame est gentille, qu'elle est généreuse!*"

With the odd little package in her hand, but with all the fervor of her coquettish heart centered on her new ring, Gabrielle a minute later in the servants' hall collided with the dignified, not to say portly, frame of Mr. William Chivvers. That gentleman, being off duty and at peace with the world, playfully caught her by the arms. "Oh, oh, oh!" he chuckled. "You almost run me down."

The soft resilience of Gabrielle's round arms was grateful to his touch. Still holding her, he beamed down at her benignantly.

"And where might you be going, my pretty maid?" he wanted to know.

"Ah, M. Sheevair," cried Gabrielle, "sink—a *pacquet* to put in the post *encore* to-night!"

Mr. Chivvers disengaged one of his pleasantly occupied hands, gravely took the package, and slipping it into his coat-tail pocket, again resumed his hold and his benignant smile.

"Give me," Gabrielle pleaded. "I muss."

Chivvers slowly shook his head.

"No, little girl," he said, with perfect gentleness, "you must not. I'll mail the package. You have something else to do."

"Oh, M. Sheevair, you make me fear!"

"Not 'arf," said Chivvers, appreciating the joke. "Yes, little girl, there is something else which you 'ave got to do."

"Somesing terreeble?"

"No doubt, no doubt; and that's to come along with me and drink a glass of wine."

Chivvers glanced quickly over his shoulder. The coast was clear. Gabrielle was willing. And why not, pray?

He gallantly sealed the invitation with a chaste kiss on Gabrielle's beautifully arched right eyebrow.

With Gabrielle on his arm and his coat-tails swinging with a certain majesty—there was no hint that a dollar with a curse on it might have found there its temporary resting-place—he passed on down the hallway.

## CHAPTER XL.

### A BREAK FOR LIBERTY.

HUGH FRAIL hadn't exaggerated the extent of the misfortune that had befallen Turga in that encounter of theirs. It is true that things otherwise were not precisely as reported. In response to Turga's blow Frail had struck back—blindly, wildly. And then, as Turga side-stepped, he had been bowled over by a passing automobile.

Bruised, dusty, and with that sickness at heart which many persons feel when they have been subjected to physical violence of any kind, not knowing what had become of the other actors in the nocturnal drama—and, moreover, not caring—he made his way painfully along a certain footpath he remembered down the wooded cliff to the road below.

Not far away he could see the lighted façade of a saloon. It wasn't drink that he wanted—he had had quite enough of that—but there he knew that he could receive other attentions—a brush-up and a wash most likely.

A street-car without many passengers in it carried him back to town. He completed the journey in a taxicab.

He was in a frightful humor. Before he had so much as undressed himself he had discharged the insupportable Swiss. The man left grumblingly. Turga had the final satisfaction of narrowly missing the valet's head with a shoe.

Left alone, he gingerly crawled into his bath. There was one especially ugly bruise on his side that caused him exquisite torture. In some unaccountable way, moreover, the skin had

been scratched from one side of his face. He felt very old, very decrepit, disgusted with the world—all of these things and something more. He felt frightened.

He had been mauled by a heavy hand. As he looked back on the care-free insolence of the morning it all seemed incredible. So blithely had he started out to see Agatha! The day had ended so differently from what he had foreseen!

It struck him with a chill to think of the way that he had gone, in spite of himself, to the hotel where he had met Mrs. Frail, instead of to the restaurant whither he had intended to go.

Why had he done it? He didn't know. It was that which frightened him.

With a gleam of satisfaction he thought of the unread letter he had received from Elin Carstairs. Vaguely he remembered that the tone of it was comforting, endearing. He needed something like that, Heaven knew!

He looked for it everywhere—in drawer after drawer, under the bed, under the pillow—adding the exasperation of a fruitless search to the already heavy burden of his overwrought nerves.

He wished now that he hadn't discharged the valet. That he had simply murdered him instead. He thought with passionate regret what joy would have been his in feeling the fellow's ignoble throat in the grip of his fingers.

No use, the letter was not to be found. It gave him an added pang. Even this consolation was denied him. He felt isolated, alone—alone save for this invisible presence, this hand he could not see which was crushing him into ways that he would not go; that was leading him on to destruction.

An ivory-handled razor came under his touch as he opened the bath-room cabinet. He picked it up with a feeling of fearful joy. There was always a way out.

He held the thing in his hand—let

his eyes turn from the polished blade to the blue veins in his wrist, then back again. It would be painless—swift—lethal—a cut just there.

He could even keep his arm in warm water while it lasted. He could almost forget what he had done—forget everything except that the wide doors were swinging open for him to go through.

But even as he desired the thing, felt the first glow of anticipation, the hand that held the razor lifted it back to its place in the cabinet. He resisted. It was as though his will were not. A force greater than any will of his commanded every muscle.

Still disobedient to that will of his, the hand reached out and closed the cabinet door.

Turga passed a sleepless night. In the early dawn he went out into the streets again. There was one other hope of salvation which he had not forgotten.

He mingled with the serried crowds coming up from the East Side for their day's work. But it seemed to him that their faces and bearing were not what they were that other time when he had moved along with them. He felt that he was being stared at curiously; that he was an interloper.

They had rested through the night from a day's work; had accumulated strength for other labor. He had neither labored nor rested nor had work to do. On his face and in his walk was the ignominy of a common brawl. No wonder they looked at him!

He paused at last before a flaming placard advertising a certain steamship-line to Europe. He stared at it a long time, not even daring to formulate his thought—fearful lest the invisible presence crush out this new hope. But this was the thing that he would do.

Keeping his thoughts away from the project as much as possible, he dawdled long over a breakfast in a quiet

restaurant, went to his banker's as soon as the place was open, arranged to have his funds sent to him in Paris.

There was a steamer sailing that same day—with a short passenger-list at this time of the year. Turga engaged a stateroom.

He felt as a fugitive from justice must feel when doing that—with the strong, invisible hand outstretched, ready to drag him back. Was it all a delusion? He dared not answer.

A full two hours ahead of sailing-time Turga was on the steamer. He was in a state of dreadful expectancy—of mingled hope and fear. At first he walked the deck. But as the crowds increased he locked himself in his stateroom.

It was as though each moment were his last. He tried to read, tried not to look at his watch. He threw himself on his berth with a sob.

Through the great fabric of the ship had run a tremor—there had come the mighty wail of the siren.

The ship was leaving its dock.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### IN THE SADDLE.

THE two members of the firm of Graw & Graw smiled with perfect comprehension at each other across the mahogany desk of the senior partner. Graw, senior, resembled his son—large, fair, with only a few silver strands in his exceedingly well-trained mustache.

"Well, well, Freddy, so you've done gone and done it?"

"Sure have, dad," said Frederic, trying to appear nonchalant.

"Satisfied that you're right?"

"Absolutely satisfied—if you are."

The elder Graw smiled slightly, but his face was grave.

"You and I have known the Frails for a long time, son," he said. "I don't imagine that there is anything I can tell you which you don't already know."

He paused, shot a brief look of inquiry at Frederic before ostensibly fixing his attention on the end of a cigar.

"You mean about that curse business?"

"That, and—"

"I know that the Frail finances are not all that they might be, if that's what you mean," Freddy averred. "But of course that doesn't make any difference."

"I'm glad to hear you say it, Fred. As for the curse, it may be tommyrot; and again it may not be—Agatha's father and I were pretty good friends, you know, and I think you'll agree with me that the family has had rather more than its share of regrettable incidents. But that is neither here nor there. There is hardly a great or near-great family in the United States, in the world, except ours"—he punctuated the claim with another smile—"that hasn't got not only one skeleton in the closet, but several.

"We can't dodge such things. No one but a fool or a cad would try to. Don't run away from a curse—grab ahold of it. That's what I say, and that's what you're doing. God bless you!

"Now as to the Frail finances—they're all that you suggest, and possibly a trifle more so. Schloss Frelinghuysen has gone by the board. The family lawyer over there—that Dr. Melnik who came here recently, poor devil, and was killed—Heaven knows by whom—seems to have got things in a very bad mess.

"Not only that, but the American holdings are not in the best of shape—too much Latin-America; too much shaky finance in this country, receivers, and all that sort of thing. They've squandered a lot of capital otherwise—particularly Hugh. Notes, notes, notes—gambling debts, I take it; a pot of money sunk in their Cherry Hills place.

"There is something else. We'll just mention it now, Fred, then pass it

up. But, you see, I won't be here forever, and I feel as though I ought to get it off my chest."

Mr. Graw and his son looked into each other's eyes for a moment.

"Agatha is an admirable girl; I have no doubt of it. But her mother—if Mrs. Frail continues to run round with this young Turga—you know."

Over the younger man's face there had crept an extra shade of pink, but he smiled manfully.

"I got you dad," he said softly.

For an interval he struggled for speech, hesitated, smiled again like an awkward boy.

"Go on," said the father kindly.

"I've fought it all out, dad," said Frederic—"fought it all out; and I admit that it sort of had me guessing for a while. But I will grab ahold of this darned old curse of the Frails; I will earn enough money for Agatha and her folks—even if she hasn't got a cent of her own; and I will take them all in hand. Why, darn it, I've begun already. I'm in the saddle now, and if the darned filly tries to bolt—"

"Are you referring to your bride-elect?"

"Er—no. I was referring to—"

He was interrupted by the ringing of his father's private telephone. The elder Graw reached for the instrument, listened a moment, then handed it over to his son.

"They've evidently begun to depend on you already," he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

With exquisite diplomacy he left the junior partner of the firm alone.

Graw knew instinctively from the moment that he had taken the instrument in his hand that some sort of serious news awaited him. It was Agatha's voice that thrilled out the news.

"Chivvers is in the hospital. He wants to see you."

"How'd he get there—sick?"

"An accident in the street—we've just learned where he was. We don't know the details."

"Was he drunk?"

"It couldn't have been that. We're in such a state—mother and I. We know that it is something terrible and mysterious. And he wants to see you."

Young Graw was hanging up the receiver as his father strolled in.

"Chivvers in the hospital," Frederic explained. "The family ghost again. I'm going to get busy."

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE HORNS OF THE BULL.

HE found the dutiful Chivvers installed in a private room of the big hospital to which he had been sent when picked up the night before, after the street-car had struck him. The butler had a broken leg and a few bruises, but he was doing very nicely, sir, and sorry to inconvenience you.

"Why, you old sport," said young Mr. Graw heartily, "the only thing that surprises me was that you didn't get it long ago—running round the way you do."

Chivvers smiled dutifully, but it was quite apparent that he had not asked his young mistress to get Graw to come to see him for just mere idle chat.

"There is something back of all this, sir," said Chivvers, after giving a preliminary sketch of his accident. "There is something back of it all. As you are to become a member of the family—and a mighty great joy it is to me to know it, sir—thank you kindly"—Graw had shaken hands with Chivvers on the strength of the declaration—"I thought it was only proper for me to speak to you about it, you being rather more serious like than Mr. Hugh."

Chivvers composed himself to the labors of composition. It was quite evident that he had a story to tell.

"I'll begin at the beginning," he said.

"And when was that?"

"The beginning of what brought

me here was, you might say, the first time that I ever looked at Gabrielle."

"I got you there, all right, Chivvers—a darned fine girl; Mrs. Frail thinks the world of her."

"And perfectly respectable," said Chivvers profoundly, "even if she is French."

"A fine, honest woman," said Graw.

"Her honesty was the beginning of it," Chivvers replied.

"Hold oh, Chivvers; now you've got two beginnings."

"Simultaneous, although at different times," Chivvers explained. "But Gabrielle was doing Mrs. Frail's bedroom the other day—you know, Mrs. Frail would never let any one else muss round with her private affairs—and Gabrielle was arranging the curtains like, when she finds a piece of money lying on the floor. She notices at once that it isn't an ordinary piece of change—rather a keepsake like."

"This being so, Gabrielle doesn't hand the coin back as she might ordinarily have done; nor yet does she put it back into Mrs. Frail's purse—Mrs. Frail never carrying a piece of change that big. She says it's too heavy and makes her feel uncomfortable—says that it spoils the fit of her gown or her bag and makes blue spots where it bangs against it; you know, sir, Mrs. Frail was born a princess—a princess of the blood."

"And then, what? Don't mind if I smoke, do you?"

"Why, bless me, sir."

Chivvers made a move as though he would have gladly got the matches off the mantelpiece for his guest, then relinquished the idea with a sigh.

"And then," he resumed his story, "Gabrielle—a fine girl she is, sir—puts the coin into a drawer where Mrs. Frail keeps a lot of trinkets like. And Gabrielle hears nothing more about it until last night. Nor do I, until—"

"Until—"

"Well, you see, I was closing up the house for the night when Gabrielle she comes to me and asks me if I

knew where she could buy a postage stamp, saying as how Mrs. Frail had just given her a package for to mail. Not liking to see her go out into the streets at that late hour, and none of the other servants being on duty, I offered to do the errand. And here I am."

"It's darned interesting," said Graw, "but I don't quite get you."

Chivvers had merely taken time to catch his breath. His face had suddenly taken on something of dramatic seriousness. When he spoke again his voice was intense. He was less of the servant, more of the man.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Frelinghuysen *thaler*—the winged dollar of the Frails?"

"Yes,"

"Open the drawer of the little table at your side."

Graw did so. What he saw was a broken pasteboard box—the wrapping had disappeared in the course of the accident.

"Do you see it?"

The young man pushed back the crushed and broken cover. He picked up the thing—a worn dollar with a peculiar emblem scratched on it—a rough cross with winglike projections on the extremities of the arms.

He examined it in silence. He wasn't quite sure, but it seemed to him that there was something familiar about it. Then he remembered—it was a coin like this which had passed from Count Carlos Turga to Hugh Frail weeks ago at the checkers. It was the night that Hugh had almost killed himself on his wild ride to Cherry Hills.

"So this is it!" he murmured half aloud.

"Yes, sir—that is it—the *thaler* of the Frelinghuysens—the dollar of the Frails—the family curse—the curse of all who possess it."

With his eyes on the old servant's face, a slight smile on his lips, Graw calmly thrust the coin into his pocket.

"Oh, don't do that, sir."



"Why not?"

"Look at me—here in the hospital. Look at the family! I have been with them so many years—have seen so many things—death and destruction—tears. Oh, oh, oh, what tears have been shed in the family, sir!"

Graw laughed—a trifle forced—but he laughed.

"I'm strong," he said. "I won't run away from the bull, Chivvers. I'll grab it by the horns."

"Ah, but the horns of the bull are long and sharp," said Chivvers. "Not the horns of the bull, sir, but the devil's own."

Nobody denies that there is such a thing as coincidence in the affairs of men—whether they carry about with them charms unlucky or otherwise. Graw still had the coin in his pocket an hour or so later as he returned to his office.

He was going to show it to his father, ask his advice, find out all about the thing. Vanity, vanity—the vanity of human intentions!

As he entered the outer office, Mr. Purcell, the head clerk, hurried forward with a face stamped deep with anguish.

"I've been trying to get you," he faltered.

"What's the matter?"

Purcell gently pushed Graw back into the outer hall, following after.

"Oh, Fred," he blurted, "hurry home. Your father has had an attack."

### CHAPTER XLIII.

"FOR BETTER OR FOR—"

GRAW kept the dollar.

It was even in his pocket that sleety, gray and boisterous day of his father's funeral. All the time that the choir was singing and the preacher was delivering his feeling little discourse, he sat there in the front pew with the fingers of his right hand toying with that smooth, silver disk.

He had grown immeasurably older and stronger—so he felt. Certain nebulous principles of his youth had all of a sudden solidified into a life philosophy, as real, almost as tangible—it seemed—as this emblem of something else that he would not relinquish.

There was no such thing as a curse nor a ghost—no such thing, even, as bad luck.

He was sure of it. He would stick it out. He would fight for his belief no less grimly than a certain ancestor of his had fought for some earlier tenet; even if, like his ancestor, he had to go to the stake.

That last conversation that he had had with his father he regarded as a sort of moral testament. He had passed his word in a way and had received the paternal O. K.

Before the winter had softened into spring he was carrying his unwritten plan of campaign into execution. He had entered more and more deeply into the counsels of the Frails. In a way they had shared his mourning.

Chivvers, walking with a limp, but otherwise fully recovered, still urged him whenever opportunity offered to get rid of the coin, still adhered to the belief that nothing but evil could come of it. In a way the old servant's fears seemed to be on the verge of realization.

It is true that the family had acquired a new sense of calm and strength that it had never before experienced. There were fewer nerves, fewer escapades, fewer breaches of the domestic peace.

But the financial situation was going from bad to worse, in spite of Graw's utmost efforts. He was taking advantage of the comparative firmness of the market to save what remained by judicious reinvestment. But he was appalled at times by the quantity and quality of the securities that had found lodgment in the Frail deposit-vault.

On the other hand, his own affairs were moving along in a way that could not have been better. It was as though

all the thought and devotion which he was bringing to the interests of others reacted on his own.

He sat alone in his office one night after almost every one else had gone. He sat in his father's chair at his father's desk, that shiny coin of ill-omen before him on the blotting-pad.

The place had fallen very silent. Hardly any sound reached him even from the street.

It was almost as though his father were there, keeping him company, telling him that he was fighting a good fight, to keep on the way he was going, never to weaken.

Purcell opened the door and whispered:

"A young lady to see you, sir."

Graw started up.

Before he could speak Agatha had come into the room. She came forward, smiling, yet slightly pale. The discreet Purcell had already closed the door. Graw caught Agatha in his arms, pressed her lithe and supple form close to his. It was the first time that she had ever come to see him at the office like that. He was profoundly touched.

"Agatha, my little sweetheart!"

"Hello, Fred! Are you mad at me?"

"Mad?"

He kissed her—that appealing to him, no doubt, as the most forceful form of negation.

"But I couldn't help it," said Agatha. "I've been so blue! I've felt all day—o-oh! What a terrible day it has been!—as though that old Frelinghuysen ghost was poking me with his icy fingers."

Graw laughed, drew her down beside him onto the arm of his father's chair. She looked at the coin, that he had left lying on the writing-pad, shivered, drew back. He reached over and covered it with his hand.

"I wish you'd get rid of it," she whispered.

"Nonsense!" he replied.

"Oh, but it isn't nonsense. You

ought to know that it isn't." Her lips quivered. "I've been thinking about all the horrible things in the family history all afternoon."

Graw strengthened just a little his hold about her waist.

"I'll fight your old ghost," he said.

"But you can't—no man, however brave, can fight a ghost. And I'm afraid—afraid—"

She quavered into silence.

Graw waited for her to continue, but she didn't complete whatever it was she had started to say. Again that silence which he had remarked a little while before settled down over the place. Again it was as though his father were there.

"And what if there is a Frelinghuysen ghost—a ghost of the Frails?" he said. "There are other ghosts, Agatha. Grant that the world is full of ghosts. It is true, perhaps. I'll grant it, even—this old ghost of yours and others like it. But all ghosts are not bad, Agatha. There are good ghosts, just as there are good people in the world. Listen!"

They sat there again in silence. It was getting late. The working-day, for the lower part of town at least, was over. No sound reached them even from the street.

"Listen to what?" she whispered.

"Can't you hear it?"

He also was whispering. They were like two little children sitting there, palpitant, expectant—waiting for they knew not what.

Purcell, in the outer office, walked slowly forward and back, not liking to interfere and yet not liking to go away for the night without some word. He was tremendously fond of his old employer's son—his employer now, though young Graw, unbeknown to the head clerk, had already given orders that the firm sign be changed to that of "Graw & Purcell."

His measured footsteps sent through the office a faint, recurrent echo.

"You frighten me. Hear what?" Agatha whispered again.

"When I'm here alone—as now, alone with you, Agatha, which is the same thing, for we are the same person, aren't we?—it is as though my father's spirit had returned to keep me company, to give me counsel, to make me wise and good. I can even feel the touch of his hand, almost; hear him as he goes about the old, familiar tasks."

He had been speaking very softly, and as his voice cadenced into silence Agatha put her cool hand on his farther temple, pressed his head against her face.

"I know—I hear it, too," she breathed.

There crept again into the silence of the place that ghostly, recurrent echo of a footfall.

"Good ghosts and bad," Graw repeated. "It is true, what you said just now about no man being able to fight a ghost, Agatha dear. But the good ghosts are on the side of the right. They'll fight for us. Just see if they don't. That is, if you'll stop putting it off, will marry me right away."

"I want to," said Agatha, with her face still pressed against his head. "I want to, but I love you too much. I'm afraid—afraid that the ghost will prove too strong."

"But I know a stronger ghost—a good one, Agatha dear," he replied. "You'll marry me to-night—to-night, over in Jersey?"

"Yes," she breathed.

Graw raised his voice. It was almost ringing.

"And this being so," he exclaimed, with his eyes on vacancy, "you'll help us, won't you, O my father?"

The room was dusky, for only the table-lamp—and that heavily shaded—had been lit.

And as Graw's odd question reverberated through the room they heard a voice, friendly, masculine, and with a quality of affection in it, speak the single word:

"Yes!"

Purcell had heard what he took to be a summons, had come up to the front office to say good night.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### SPRING SONG.

EVEN after the drifting snow had made the roads in and about Cherry Hills all but impassable Hugh Frail had clung to the place. All that he possessed of a moral nature had been plowed and harrowed by the influences set to work that night he had his fight with Turga.

He was no fool—at least, not permanently—and he was fully aware how close an escape not only he, but the other members of his family, had had from public scandal and disgrace. Cherry Hills was a grateful retreat—so tonic not only in its thousand acres of woods and meadows, of half-wild trails and splendid avenues, but also in its thousand memories of health and happiness, most of which were associated now with Elin Carstairs.

Turga had disappeared. He knew that. It was a matter of general comment. But whither and why no one knew.

For a while young Frail had been haunted by the real fear that Turga had been dangerously hurt. For a while, as he mooned and brooded about the broad expanses of Cherry Hills, he half expected arrest.

But as the days passed—uneventful, unchanging, save in their constantly increasing freight of health and contentment—he recovered his nerve, began to take a saner look at things.

One day he encountered Dr. Carstairs, and the old gentleman greeted him with such simple cordiality that Frail was charmed.

"Why, Frail," said the doctor, "you're looking great—brown as a nut, eyes clear."

"It wouldn't mean anything if I were to tell you that, doctor; that's the way you always look."

"I understood that you were again a neighbor of ours," the doctor went on. "I was half tempted to come over and see you—professionally, at any rate."

Frail mumbled something that might have been an invitation. The doctor had said "*ours*." The pronoun had filled him with trepidation, almost unexpected, certainly disquieting.

The doctor threw him a sidelong glance.

"It isn't good for a fellow to stick round too much by himself, you know," he said, "even in a place like Cherry Hills."

The advice encouraged Frail to ask a question which had been trembling on his lips.

"And Miss Carstairs—how is she?"

"Oh, Elin's just the same—a regular Indian."

"To tell the truth," laughed Frail, "I've been wanting her advice more than I did yours. We've let Mr. Hardy go—one forester and landscape gardener was all that the place required."

"And the other was—"

"Myself."

"Come along and have a cup of tea," said the doctor. "Elin's always ready with advice of that kind."

But Frail found an entirely different Elin from the one that he had hoped for and imagined. Perfectly gracious, hospitable, but, oh, so distant, so distraught! And before he himself had risen to go she had excused herself, to appear no more.

Another month went by—for Frail a month of loneliness and brooding, despite the health and appetite that this new life of his compelled. Then, one day the sun shone with almost forgotten warmth. The air was filled with the music of a hundred rills and freshets. Up from the steaming earth came all the perfumes of all the flowers that were to bloom a little later on.

Into the heart of Hugh Frail came

such a mighty unrest as he had never known before.

He had risen early, eaten a simple breakfast—but such a breakfast as he had never eaten in the old days—then started out for a walk through the woods.

There was still plenty of snow about in the sunless places. But almost everywhere he looked was some hint of impatient life—tender, green, swelling buds, shoals of minnows in unsuspected runlets. And there, where some small wild thing had but recently scraped the leaves away from the black earth, was a spray of arbutus.

He picked a single blossom. Some unsuspected strain of poetry deep in his nature caused him to press it to his lips—dainty, fragrant, sweet—there was something almost feminine about it.

He heard a light, firm, deerlike step and looked up guiltily. Before him, not a dozen yards away, stood Elin Carstairs.

She tried to maintain something of that same attitude which had been hers the last time they had seen each other. At first he did not smile any more than did she. They were ever so polite—polite and dull. The two things often go together.

"I just found some arbutus," he said at last, having exhausted such themes as the weather, the state of the trees, the possibilities of an early spring.

He held out his single blossom. As she took it her fingers touched his palm. Could it be possible that they had lingered there for just a fraction of a second longer than was necessary?

Frail glanced up guiltily—as though fearful that she had surprised some secret thought of his. Their eyes met. There was no possible reason—but she colored slightly, a look almost of distress flashed into her blue eyes, a feminine reflection of the look that had come into his gray ones.

It was incomprehensible; but as

Frail smiled his smile brought two full-sized tears into Elin's eyes—just as though that early spring that they had been talking about had given birth to one more freshet.

"Elin!"

Elin was also smiling, but two other tears followed the first one.

"Elin!" Frail thrilled.

There had surged up within him all the mighty unrest that he had felt a little while before. But now it was otherwise. He was savage. In his heart was tumult, the lust of battle strangely mingled with the infinite tenderness of perfect joy.

"What are you crying about?" he demanded.

"I'm not crying." Elin tossed her head.

"What do you mean by treating me like a dog?"

His brutality was half playful—the strong in the presence of the weak.

"You—you—"

Elin Carstairs was one of those innocent and fearless natures who always tried to speak the truth, even at the cost of self-inflicted pain.

"You ran away—walked away—one day when I was coming in your direction."

Frail might have denied a greater charge or a lesser one, but this thrust was too direct to be parried except by a similar blow. He wanted to say something about Turga—sought for the words, hesitated, could not find them.

"I know I did. I know I did—" he began; "because you deceived—because you led me on—made me feel—"

He was thinking so intensely about his own past sufferings that a momentary rage drove out all other sentiments.

He was still groping for words as Elin Carstairs turned, started to walk away.

"Elin!" he cried. "Stop!"

She paid no heed, took two more steps.

"Stop, I tell you!"

He had leaped to her side, obedient to a single blind impulse to keep her near him, not to let her escape again. He had seized her arm.

There were both fear and amazement, as well as flaming anger, in her face as she turned. He had released his hold almost instantly.

For a moment they had looked at each other, tense, silent.

"Don't you leave me like that," Hugh said in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "I won't let you. I need you. I love you. I won't live without you. I'll die. I'll commit suicide. I'll commit murder. There's nothing hideous in the world that I won't do. You know my family. I'll show you."

He would have said more, but in the face of the girl in front of him he saw all anger fade, all fear and amazement, until there was nothing left but a sort of childlike, almost pathetic, distress.

It smote him with pity. His own fury went out of him utterly, left nothing there but a welling desire to cherish and protect.

"Ah, no I won't," he said softly. "I'll never do anything that'll cause you pain."

Her head drooped until it rested on his shoulder, for he had moved very close to her and she hadn't drawn back.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE LONG ARM.

SPRING in Paris, also. A wonderful season with every chestnut-tree in bloom, the parks gay and fragrant with their million flower-beds, the Bois de Boulogne a dream of beauty—sweet with the smell of blossoming locust and its acres of clipped lawn. An atmosphere of tender blue that dissolved the palaces and temples along the Seine into a dream of paradise. Sprightly girls, beautiful women, good-natured *flâneurs*, rich and poor; ten thousand

cafés, each more attractive than the last.

All this, and yet Count Carlos Turga was not happy.

Into his young veins also had crept the inexplicable unrest of the season, the desire, the call to romantic adventure.

He had sought amusement, forgetfulness, a new interest in life, and had not found them. When he had first set foot on shore at Havre he had sworn never to return to America again. Now every fiber of his being was commanding him with growing insistence to turn back once more to New York, to seek out those whom he had left behind him.

He argued with himself, at first, that here alone was peace and safety. But how long did the arguments of peace and safety ever curb the spirit of youth?

He had no eyes for the other women whom he met. Every dreamy or sparkling eye that met his own—gray, blue or brown—he compared with the eyes of those who absorbed his thought, Elin Carstairs and Agatha Frail. No lips smiled at him but that he wished that it was the lip of either of these. He saw no silken, curling tresses on the back of a graceful neck without thinking how infinitely more attractive was that same aspect of Agatha, of Elin.

For, like many young men of his age, Turga was not altogether single in his devotion. Not yet was his mute worship of these two fair memories altogether equal. At times it was Agatha. At times it was Elin. At times the spirit of his loneliness sent up a swooning incense which was a sort of composite of all that both of them might have meant to him.

He was sitting, one afternoon, on the terrace of the Restaurant de la Cascade, chewing the cud of his bitterness in solitary state. Behind him, a gipsy orchestra zinged and droned through the wild harmonies of an unwritten score, when out of the swift moving harmonies there came a hint of

that weird chant which he had first heard on the night of his twenty-first birthday, which he had heard again on that other night when he and Agatha Frail had gone forth to find Paulo; and which, ever since then, had somehow become a part of the web and the woof of his complex nature.

He didn't turn. He didn't move, except for the long inhalation of the cigarette he was smoking, a slight trembling of his thin fingers.

But that slight suggestion of the invisible world in which he moved and had his being meant as much to him as a new blur of light in the focus of an astronomer's telescope—the confirmation of a belief, the realization of a long-standing condition. There was no escape.

It was no mere heart-appeal that was dragging him westward again. It was something greater than that. Heart-appeals he had experienced before, to greater or lesser extent, and had never had the least difficulty in resisting them. But here was that greater, more terrible force of the invisible hand which had gripped him about and held him.

It was the invisible hand and the long arm. What was the Atlantic, what was the length and breadth of the whole earth, of the universe even, compared to the reach of Fate?

Carriages and motors glittered past on the neighboring driveway. The waters of the cascade glistened and leaped and roared. Leaves nodded and whispered in the soft breeze. The gipsy orchestra soared and swooped and soared again.

But Turga heard none of these things, saw none of these things. He was all alone in the silence—a gray silence shot now and then with the crimson phantasmagoria of memory.

With a sudden impulse, he leaped to his feet, paid his reckoning, caused his carriage to be called.

Still in that nightmare of aloofness, of isolation he drove back to his hotel.

He saw the people and things that



he passed, but they were not real; they did not belong to the same world. In that world of his there was a solitary inhabitant and this was he. There was a solitary power—a solitary primal cause—and this was the invisible hand, the invisible hand of the long arm.

"I am going back to America."

It was his own voice speaking to the clerk of the hotel, but even as he listened to this voice delivering the message he was struck by the silliness of it, the silly futility.

Of course he was going back to America. He could not do otherwise. He might as well have proclaimed the rising and the setting of the sun, the swing of the stars through the heavens at night, the eternal march of the material universe. He also was in his orbit. What will of his could change his direction, could change the ultimate period of dissolution?

Now that he no longer resisted, he found that he was strangely happy. He was serene. He looked back on his recent rebellion against compelling Fate as a petty thing—irritant, painful, and unnecessary withal.

Those who saw him on the steamer marveled. Few handsomer young men had any one ever seen—so dark, so dreamy, so tragic; long-fringed eyes, a cheek that was apt to pale and glow like that of a girl, and yet, for all that, a sort of leonine strength and virility dominating overwhelmingly and excluding any suggestion of feminine weakness.

He made no acquaintances, acknowledged no friends. He kept himself apart. He might have been the young Napoleon on the sands of Egypt confronting the millennial sphinx.

The ship came up with the eastern shore in the late night with the serried constellation of Coney Island sparkling low on the horizon.

Alone, as usual, leaning on the rail of the deserted deck, Turga looked and looked. There were lights, gay and scintillant, to be sure, but, great God!

how small and dim they were compared to the vast darkness and mystery of the night.

And there, somewhere beyond the purple-black curtain which shut him in, lay the thing from which he had fled, the thing to which he returned.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### NIGHTINGALE AND VAMPIRE.

THE first disappointment that awaited him was when he sought out the new home of his old servant Paulo. He had looked forward with such pleasure to meeting him! Here, at least, was some one of whose affection he was sure. He felt that he needed affection. He had thought it all out. He would adopt Paulo and his bride, the former Mme. Zidek—that blond giantess, Maria, as well—if only they would in turn adopt him.

Now that he was again back in the only country in the world that he felt he could call his own, he had recovered, to a certain extent, his courage and his faith.

This was no extraordinary phenomenon, he told himself. Each year Mother Columbia received into her broad bosom so many lonely children—men like himself who had no other mother, who were children in the night, frightened and forlorn. How many myths of terror had disappeared in the welcome of her strong arms; how much of terror and of loneliness had been banished in the safe asylum of her protection!

But, when he came to the little basement-restaurant where he had last seen his old friend and servant, the place was deserted. The privet-bushes were withered and dead, the windows were dusty, a padlock was on the door.

Without hope, he made a few inquiries among the neighbors. He learned that the late tenants of the restaurant had long since moved away, had left no address—had gone back to the old country, so they thought.

As Turga paused for a last look through the grimy windows he seemed to hear again the old musician—

"But this is the end of the fatal span—"

He whiled away the morning hours as best he could, sought gaiety and found it not. He drove through the park, went wherever there was some promise of crowds, of diversion. No use. Oh, to get away from himself.

After that first check to his hopes in the morning when he had failed to find Paulo, he determined to put off until the afternoon any further effort to realize his more intimate ambitions—that is to say, to find something of the old solace and excitement and, who knows, perhaps something more, in the society of Agatha Frail.

He was obsessed with a growing fear that she also would be absent from town, that something would have happened to her. Yet, when he drove past the Frail mansion, it was evident that the family was in residence. The windows were open, the shades were up, he even had a glance of some fresh flowers in one of the upper chambers.

He managed, somehow, to get through luncheon. He ate, though he knew not what he ate, nor had he any appetite. He had even sought the old fictitious courage of a once-loved cocktail. It might as well have been a glass of insipid water.

It was about three o'clock when he finally summoned a taxi and gave the address which had so long been throbbing in his mind. Had he been going to keep an appointment for his own execution he could not have been more abnormally expectant.

He knew that something was wrong, and yet he refused to permit himself to think about it. He essayed to hold himself with the thought that, after all, he was but a molecule on the Wheel of Chance, that nothing could happen to him; but the thought, wherein he

had found a sort of static contentment before, gave him no contentment now.

Aye! Aye! The invisible hand was upon him. The long arm had reached out across the ocean and had brought him back. There was only one thing in the world that he wanted, after all, and that was some one to break this cursed loneliness, some one to share, if needs be, his besetting fate.

He was immaculately attired, as was his custom. Many of the people whom he passed turned to look. But, even as he felt their eyes upon him, he was still the thing apart. It was not he that they saw—merely the outward semblance. He himself was as invisible as a ghost in the sunshine, as the mythical vampire in the flush of dawn.

The machine had stopped. Across the sidewalk lay the steps his feet had so often pressed before. Up there, deep in the shadowy arch, was the door through which he had so often passed.

His hand had pressed the ivory button. The door swung open and he saw the face of the Frail butler—familiar, yet unfamiliar.

"There is no one at home, sir."

"No one home—they are out of town?"

"There is no one at home, sir."

The door closed. The expected had fallen. For a moment Turga stood there bereft of the power of thought or movement. He still held his card in his gloved fingers.

"Get ye gone! This no place for you. To you—there is no one at home."

He was back in the motor. Something in that handsome, dark, young face had caused the chauffeur to drive slowly on without so much as asking where next.

Where next, indeed?

Finally the chauffeur glanced back with something of sympathy in his deep-graven mask.

Turga gave the address of his apartment. There, at least, he would be safe from the scrutiny of his fellow

men. Even the loneliness of physical isolation would be better than the loneliness of strange, peering eyes. There also—he whispered it even to his own heart for fear that that other presence would hear and understand—there also was a certain cabinet, and in the cabinet an ivory-handled razor. Perhaps, this time—this time—

The thought gave him consolation.

But there was another sort of consolation awaiting him there. It was a consolation that filled him at once with grief and joy. Some accident of his restlessness had caused him to move an ormolu clock on the mantelpiece of his room.

He saw a piece of white paper under it. Ordinarily, he would have passed it by with a mental resolve to criticise the housekeeper, or some thing like that; but his restlessness caused him to pull it forth. There was not only one sheet, but several.

For a while he glanced at it vaguely, wonderingly, then gave a little gasp which was almost a sob.

It was the long-forgotten letter from Elin Carstairs.

He saw an endearing word, caught a phrase of sympathy. Tears came to his eyes. He could read no more just then.

And he had forgotten it—had thrown it aside!

The nightingale has sung to the vampire! An angel of high Heaven had wept for Satan!

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### A SONG AND A CURSE.

Now, who is there in the world who can tell the way of a maid with a man? Who is there who can measure the dynamics of a love-letter?

A marvelous thing, that letter of Elin Carstairs; so marvelous and so sacred that none should harbor the impious wish to share with that fool valet his sacrilege. The veil of mystery shall conceal it forever more.

Besides, there are other love-letters in the world—oh, many of them—written without the aid of logicians, unsullied by the withering breath of caution—yet, masterpieces all.

Turga gloated over it all afternoon—a starving man who had found, not a crust but a banquet table, a parched mariner cast up on the golden Hesperides.

He lay about his apartment all the remainder of the afternoon in a state bordering on prayer. Not once did he let the letter leave his hand. He read it time and again.

Here was assurance such as he had never dreamed of, or hoped for, that he was not alone. He had sent up his petition for some one—for *some one!* And the petition had been granted.

There was no lessening of his melancholy. If anything, that was even more profound than ever. But it had become in some way sacred—a sacred element had come into it. Even to his sinister blazon there was another side. It didn't seem to him to be possible that any girl in the world could express such tenderness, such consecration, such fine-hope, and ever again be anything different from what she here portrayed herself.

The sun was sinking in a splendid riot of gold and crimson beyond the Pallisades when he again fared forth. The very wealth of color in the sky had its effect on his own colorful and exotic temperament.

Hitherto the day, though fair, had been somewhat too ethereal. After all, he was of the earth. He was the young animal in quest of the good things that the earth, and the earth alone, had to yield.

Before those gorgeous colors, like triumphant banners, had faded from the west he had crossed the Hudson and started for the home of the girl who had written to him. He would have departed long ere that—for his heart was leaping with eagerness—only he had dared not arrive too early.

It would be better to arrive a little

late, well after dinner, when the peace of night had fallen and when, most likely, he would find Elin alone.

He had told the chauffeur to take his time. Quietly they rolled through scented woodlands, and again out into open spaces where on the heavy breeze there came hints of the tide rushing up from the sea to greet Father Hudson.

While they were still a full hundred yards from the Carstairs home he bade the chauffeur to stop; got down, went ahead on foot. There was something deliciously romantic and mysterious about it.

Out here in the country it seemed already so late. He found himself in the feel of the night, and it gave him the old atavistic thrill that almost all men experience at such a time, in such a place, on such an occasion.

His heart was beating fast. His breath was short. He paused and listened. Through the damp and fragrant silence he had caught the notes of a piano—a minor chord, complex, sweet, soft, with something about it of the eternal lure and magic of a young girl's heart.

Before he had time to measure the full beauty of it he had heard something else even more transcendent—so it seemed to him, standing there so high-strung, so melancholy, and yet so glad. It was the voice of Elin Carstairs singing—the one voice in the world his heart most hungered for—a love-song, some old serenade.

He crept forward as stealthily as an Indian, fearful lest he break the charm.

There was no danger of it. The song soared on—always with the haunting accompaniment of minor chords. In a way it expressed, as nothing else could have expressed, the full significance of the present hour—so full of sadness, yearning, and promise.

He opened the gate and quietly made his way up the path. He was possessed with a tremendous desire to gloat a little, to enjoy her physical

presence in secret, even as he had already enjoyed her heavenly voice.

No one was on the porch. The windows were open, the soft curtains slowly billowing in and out as though translating the music of the song into the terms of some mystic dance. Every now and then he could catch a fleeting glimpse of the interior—each time it gave him an expectant thrill.

But he was just outside of one of the windows before he could see the singer—a bit of white dress, the infinitely softer whiteness of a slender forearm, a graceful neck surmounted by a mass of spun-gold, and then a lifted chin, a swelling throat. Oh, great god Pan! He had forgotten how beautiful she was!

He leaned a little farther forward. He saw that somebody was standing at her side.

It was Hugh Frail.

The song ended. But the chin went higher. Through a blur—for there had fallen upon him a sort of suffocating fog—he saw their two faces meet, merge into one.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### TURGA MEETS A FRIEND.

HE stumbled back along the path to the gate, careless of noise, his feet as unsteady as those of a drunken man. At the gate he paused—a hand on either post, reeling mentally, clinging there as though he were afraid that he would fall.

Until this last blow had fallen upon him he had nourished in the back of his head some vague idea that he was the avenger, the instrument of retribution by which others would be made to feel the working out of ultimate justice. Now the truth could no longer be evaded or denied. Instrument he remained, perhaps; but he was likewise the victim. He it was who would be gibbeted—hanged in infamy on this thing of his own making.

Along the fence there came a shad-

owy figure. At first Turga thought vaguely that it was his chauffeur. But even his confused senses soon told him that he was wrong.

In the dim light he could see that the approaching stranger had on the garb of a laborer. The man came closer. They were face to face, very close to one another.

Then Turga recognized him. It was that dark-eyed man with whom he had had the fight, the man from whom he had wrung the secret of Paulo's address.

If the man still bore him malice he showed it in no other way than by a sardonic smile.

"Hello, my brother," he said, speaking the dialect they had used on that other occasion. "You have come back to us."

Turga's reply was expressed almost inaudibly.

"Yes."

For a time they stood there looking at each other—the laborer with something of a sinister grin on his face, yet touched with sympathy; Turga, still gazing dull-eyed, struggling for comprehension.

"Come with me," the stranger said.

"My chauffeur," Turga whispered drunkenly.

Said the man: "You won't need him any more."

There was something symbolic in the statement—it was both threat and promise. Turga didn't care. Nothing mattered any more. He closed the gate.

"We'll go and tell him."

They went back along the road to where the automobile was waiting. The chauffeur was hunched down in his seat, dozing. There are always those who doze through comedy and tragedy alike.

"I shall not need you any more," said Turga.

The man started up with a look of surprise. Turga handed over a thin pad of bills he had drawn from his pocket. The chauffeur was still exam-

ining these—joy gradually dawning through his stupefaction—as they turned and left him.

Back along the road they went, past the Carstairs home. Silence had fallen upon it, but the house still peered at them through the black trees from its lighted windows, as though it, too, were stupefied at what was taking place. They turned into a narrow lane which separated the property from the Cherry Hills estate. They had proceeded along this for some hundred yards when Turga paused.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

It was the question of one who stirs in his sleep—the unresisting curiosity of a man who finds himself an actor in some fateful dream.

"To our camp—the camp of the brotherhood—back where the other Cave-Dwellers are awaiting us."

"The old woman—is she there?"

"Grandmother is dead," said the man. "She told us to be expecting you. She said that Fate would bring you to us without our looking for you. Those were her last words. And here you are."

"And here I am," Turga answered.

"And now what is to be done?"

"We have been working on that cursed lake. That is what has to do with the plan of things. Now, I suppose, that you are here, we'll understand why."

Silence again descended upon them. Nor yet for a while did they move.

Turga was making no effort to resist, to turn back, to assert any volition of his own. Destiny, the invisible hand, gripped him about as close, as soft, as unescapable, as the atmosphere. It was merely a moment of reflection, of contemplation.

Out from the soft, black ocean of the night there came a fresh ripple of music—Elin Carstairs's cool, slim hand on the piano—the hand he would never touch again. The music tinkled on—like the sad gaiety of fluttering handkerchiefs for the outward-bound.

"Let us go where it has been set

for us to go," said Turga, with a new note of solemnity in his voice.

Together they passed on into the night.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### DREAM-STUFF AND SHADOWS.

THOUGH Chivvers had thrown an added meaning into that statement of his to Turga, that nobody was at home, he had spoken the simple truth. They were all out at Cherry Hills. There was to be a wedding out there. The new lake was nearing completion. There was to be a family festival. No greater gaiety prevailed at Versailles on the eve of the French Revolution.

Frederic Graw and Agatha were happily married. Their happiness was just about perfect. The rebellious spirit of the bride chafed not under the strong hand of the new lord and master, for the hand, with all its strength, was very gentle. Into her life had come the first hint of law and order. She found it surprisingly grateful.

As for Graw, he had that other joy of a strong man who bends his strength to a congenial labor.

His own affairs were moving along with perfect success. The new firm of Graw & Purcell was by way of becoming a power in the Street.

Even the former Princess Viatka, widow of the late Horace Frail, had come into a new bequest of happiness—of happiness very different from that of the others, but happiness still. For Mrs. Frail delighted in change, and change there most certainly was—not only change, but a sort of fearful expectancy.

She contemplated the things that were going on about her with an interest which was almost impersonal. Like many complex natures of her kind, she was gifted with an intuition which at times bordered on divination. And she knew that in some way these changes concerned her least of all.

She had given herself over to dream-

ing more than usual. It was about the only activity that remained to her with which her new son-in-law could not find fault. She felt his domination and recognized the nature of it without being told.

She no longer even smoked in public. Gone forever were her more or less innocent flirtations with callow youth—callow, that is, and otherwise.

But her dreams—ah, that was different!

Again she flirted and danced through Europe. A hundred old intrigues, forgotten until now, came again to enliven her somnolence.

She recalled again the fiery courtship of Horace Frail. *Dieu!* How handsome he was—how handsome and wild! When he had caught her in his arms that night on the terrace of Monte Carlo! When he had half killed the Austrian *attaché*! What a wonderful and fitting climax it was when they had brought him home to Schloss Frelinghuysen at last with a rapier wound through his unruly heart!

But, most of all, she thought of Sergius. That was more recent, more real, and, best of all, so filled with promise! More and more she confessed that here was her expectancy.

Sergius also was handsome, also was wild, also was—the thrill of it returned to her—also brutal.

She knew, moreover, that Sergius was in some way connected with those legendary Cave-Dwellers who had always haunted the mountains adjacent to the Frelinghuysen estate in Bohemia; that down from the Middle Ages these nameless folk had carried on their feud with the nobler line. It gave to Sergius just that needed element of mystery to make him wholly fascinating.

And even so, there was a sound material basis for these wild vagaries. There would soon be little left in America to keep her there. Graw was rapidly shearing the family of the romantic peril that had made it so much worth while.



Negotiations were practically complete now for the sale of the great town house and all that it contained. Before very long on the place where it stood there would rise another sort of palace—one of those new department-stores so luxurious in everything except shadowy tradition.

As for Hugh Frail, he had apparently once more answered the old question as to whether a youth who was wholly bad can suddenly become wholly good.

From that night when he had so nearly been the cause of Turga's death he had been transformed—a gradual process, of course, but rapid enough and dating from that time.

What the love he bore for out-of-doors had begun his love for Elin Carstairs had completed. Besides, he had absorbed something of that new, sane, practical philosophy that Frederic Graw had drawn from his father—the strong man who doesn't run away from a ghost, but grabs hold of it, the old philosophy of the horns of the bull or the horns of the devil.

The date of the wedding was drawing near. In a way it was to be a date doubly notable—made so not only by the nuptials, but by the inauguration of the new lake. Everything was preparing to this end. There were to be illuminations, a choral festival, a ball. After a manner, the whole world was to be advised that the house of Frail, once the house of Frelinghuysen, was to enter upon a new era.

They were working day and night to get the new lake completed. There was no water in it yet. That was to be a part of the celebration—when a final blast was to be shot that would throw up the last mass of granite and let the waters rush in from the little river that wound its way through the estate.

More than a hundred workmen—dark, red-flanneled—were laboring there at high speed.

Often in the pleasant, tepid afternoons Agatha or her mother, or some

guest of theirs—there were many guests—would stroll out onto the balustraded terrace of the great house and look out across the new moat at the toilers there.

A good many of these pick-and-shovel men were Bohemians. Sometimes there came to the watchers fragments of coarse jests and songs in the language of the Czechs; they would feel the flash of burning dark eyes upon them.

It never failed to give both Agatha and her mother some slight thrill as of other times—almost as though still hovering near was that historic curse which otherwise they had almost come to forget.

It was that way one afternoon, with the wedding only a few days off.

A dark-eyed workman was chanting to the slow cadence of his rising and falling mattock. Now and then his fellows joined him in a humming monotone.

The music was very strange. There was something uncanny about it. Agatha strove to remember. It seemed to her that she had heard it before.

Momentarily the green trees, the teeming activity, disappeared. She had a vision of the old man playing the hurdy-gurdy, the basement restaurant where they had found Paulo—they, she and Turga.

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## CHAPTER L.

### SILK AND RED FLANNEL.

EVEN a mind less subtle than that of Agatha's might have sensed the elements of tragedy about the place. All the flowers from the Cherry Hills gardens and hothouses could not have made the old house otherwise than grim.

The laughter of the guests echoed still in corners haunted by dark memories. The music of the orchestra brought up from New York could not quite submerge that half-heard refrain

from the pick-and-shovel men in the unfinished lake.

Everywhere, all the time, hovered some vague hint of impending conflict—the hosts of light and the hosts of darkness arrayed for the Armageddon of the Frails.

On one side were the Frails and their guests. The younger element predominated. Chaperonage existed in name rather than fact. There were too many opportunities for flirtation to render any system of close guardianship possible—mile upon mile of shaded avenues, of footpaths and bridle-paths, acres of secluded woods, of meadows and gardens.

The broad terrace had become a summer camp of red-and-white striped umbrellas and tea-tables—tea-tables by courtesy, for anything that anybody could possibly desire in the way of refreshment could be served there—and here, every afternoon and evening, the orchestra went into alternate swoons and frenzies—the music of Vienna and Buenos Aires.

The Gorot twins, famous for their beauty, were up from New Orleans—blue-eyed, dark-haired, languid, and graceful, marvelous dancers, consummately versed in every art that ever rendered a woman dangerous.

Tante Thérèse—also dangerous in her day, but now given to the milder dissipations of tobacco, absinth, and bridge—kept her conscience clear by forbidding them to do everything that they wanted to do, well knowing that they would do it anyway.

Colonel von Steinmetz, of the Austrian cavalry, was there—head like an Easter egg, bandy legs, yet one of the most fascinating men, if not the wick-  
edest, who ever came out of Europe; a galaxy of the younger set from New York, married and unmarried, who had found it worth while to cut other arrangements for this royal good time—the Goodwoods, still undivorced, though notoriously free; the Van Trines, the Kents, the Willoughbys, an *attaché* or two from Washington.

Other guests were dropping in and out again by motor and coach.

The tired business man of the Cherry Hills lodge had wept and pleaded until Downs, the overseer, had given him one of the undergardeners as an assistant.

The great iron gates rolled open and shut by day and by night.

The standing army of maids and valets, of grooms and butlers, gained in gold what they lost in *avoirdupuis*.

Chivvers, still walking with a limp—a general wounded in service—was in supreme command. Yet he, like Agatha, like Mrs. Frail—like others there, perhaps—could hear at times, through the whirling cadences of the imported orchestra, the perpetual murmur of laughter and light speech, that deeper note of the workmen engaged on the new lake, the droning chant which rose like an audible memory of the past, a constant reminder of impending danger, subtle, haunting, ghostlike.

It was strange that most of the toiling laborers in the new lake were Bohemians—a single clan, according to all appearances—swarthy, dark-eyed, sinister.

Among themselves they spoke the dialect of the Piesen Hills—a dialect spoken in the region of Schloss Frelinghuysen.

They were being driven hard, for their work would have to be finished on the wedding-day. Yet, labor as they would, their dark eyes would still roll up to the undulant grace of the Gorot twins, of Agatha or Elin, or the other young maids and matrons there, and linger hungrily.

While they sweated and talked softly and brokenly among themselves, as is the way with those who work in the earth, they could hear the music, the chat, and laughter from the great house; could see the graceful, whirling forms of the dancers.

And late at night, when silence had submerged their own camp and the surrounding country, they could hear the

fine wail of violin and cello, the rhythmic throb of the piano; the darkness, off there across the park, would be softened by the glow of many lights.

Silk and red flannel—the contrast was too sharp, too unrelieved, too constant.

Both Mr. Downs, the overseer, and the contractor in charge of the work were secretly worried. There had been signs of rebellion. It was too late now to change.

But these clansmen were strong, avid, half-wild. They were toiling hard for a pittance. Golden fruit—everything their savage hearts could desire—was dangling there overhead, in reach—for those who were daring.

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE ULTIMATE BLAST.

ONLY that one ridge of granite remained—a natural dam between the river and the new lake. That blown away, and the water would rush into the new bed that had been prepared for it, not only in the lake itself, but into the moat as well.

It was almost a monolith, that remaining isthmus, and the miners had already honeycombed it and filled it with giant powder for the ultimate blast. The wires had been laid, the battery was in place. One touch of the lever and the rock would be shattered into a million pieces.

As a matter of precaution, the battery had been installed in one of the drawing-rooms, for the shot was to be fired by the bride-elect, and those rebellious workmen were capable of setting off the explosion at the wrong time.

"It would be no joke," said Steinmetz, with a ferocious grin, "if that mine goes off while a few of our friends are walking over it."

"It is dangerous," said Graw bravely.

"So why not shoot it now?" the Austrian cavalryman wanted to know.

"Sentiment," Graw answered. "This is to be the last shot in a long war, colonel."

"I do not understand."

"It's intended to lay forever the family ghost—you know, the ghost of the Frelinghuysens and the Frails. There always has been one, but we've got it on the jump. The marriage of Hugh with Miss Carstairs will chase the ghost out of the house, if anything will. We shoot up this rock, the waters rush into the lake and the moat—we've kept the ghost out forever afterward. You know the old tradition about ghosts and running waters."

"Might it be so," the colonel rejoined. "But I'd keep watch—be careful."

"We're doing that," said Graw. "And there is only one more day, colonel—the wedding, then the blast."

"You believe in ghosts?"

Graw drew the winged dollar from his pocket, looked down at it for a moment meditatively.

"Believe in them, my dear colonel, and defy them. Still, I shall be glad when all of these infernal wild men are off the place, when this infernal blast is shot, when the water's in the infernal moat."

They looked out of the open window in the direction of the granite ridge—that small, slumbering volcano which was destined to have such a momentous place in the history of the Frails.

From the front of the house there came the swooning rhythm of the orchestra. From an adjacent corner of the new lake a group of dark-eyed workmen sent up a counter melody, weird and suggestive of things otherwise inexpressible.

One of the Gorot girls, swinging along as light as a zephyr and as graceful as a flower, passed along the path that bordered the moat, at the side of young Bob Willoughby.

Graw and Steinmetz saw the workmen payse, look up, follow the girl with their eyes.

Steinmetz snorted, let his eyes drift again to the almost military mine that had been laid in the granite monolith.

"There are ghosts and ghosts," he said.

"Meaning—"

"Meaning," the army officer replied, "that our mine out there might be useful to blow up two-legged ghosts as well as the kind which don't use legs any more."

Graw was thoughtful. He hesitated to convey to a guest any private fears he himself may have entertained. Yet with Steinmetz it was different.

"I don't mind telling you," he said at last, "that there might be occasion for something of the kind. Both Downs, the overseer, and Ferguson, the contractor, have told me that these men have been getting ugly—that they'll bear watching."

The colonel emitted a fierce chuckle.

"I'd hate to spoil the wedding," he said; "but I love a fight. We occupy the strategic position. An attack, we set off the mine, we shoot a few, we drown a few—"

Both men turned sharply. The former Prince Viatka had drawn near unperceived.

"Oh, you dear, dear man," she sighed. "Drown, shoot, everything delightful!"

They laughed and strolled back toward the front of the house.

Just under the window where they had been talking a laborer straightened up from some task or other. He glanced up at the window with eyes scintillant, a flash of white teeth.

"O-ho," he breathed softly.

He glanced round him. He was unobserved. Just overhead, suspended from the casement on one side and on the other by a pole beyond the moat, was the insulated wire leading from the battery to the granite ridge. He looked at this wire fondly, meditatively. Again he cast his eyes about him, made sure that he was unobserved.

By a roundabout course he made his way to a grassy knoll, close to the rock,

where the wire took contact with the earth.

He drew out a heavy clasp-knife.

Furtive, watchful, he cut the wire in two.

## CHAPTER LII.

### LOWERING SKIES.

THE night had fallen velvet dark. Some presage of storm—perhaps it was a subtler intuition still—had caused Chivvers to order the gay paraphernalia of the terrace to be carried indoors while the guests were still at dinner. Some other sort of storm than the one promised by the oppressive atmosphere and the lowering sky seemed imminent.

Every one felt it. Neither the best of wine nor the best of music could quite drive the impression away.

As Agatha came out on the terrace after dinner, she noticed a sort of expectant hush—such as one notices in the lapse of a familiar sound. At first she didn't know why it was. She peered out into the opaque obscurity with a little shiver. There was nothing there—only darkness and the faint, dim, tremulous souvenir of that song she had heard.

Frederic came out and slipped his arm about her. Then she remembered.

"Why aren't they working tonight?" she asked. "Are they all through?"

"All through," Graw answered. "All except blowing up the rock."

"I'm glad—those workmen scared me. Have they gone away?"

He paused before answering, pondering on things that he was loath to tell her.

"Why do you pause? Oh, I feel as though something terrible were going to happen. Tell me—what is it?"

"There has been trouble," he said unwillingly. "A fight—a strike—"

He paused. He had almost said too much. But he was not to escape like that.

"And a murder?" Agatha whispered.

"I declare, Agatha," said Graw, "you're positively uncanny at times."

"I felt it," Agatha replied. "I felt it in the night—and from the way you spoke."

"It's nothing to worry your head about," he assured her, as he bent and kissed her temple.

As though to give him the lie a dark form clambered out of the night. It was Downs, the overseer of the estate. He started to speak, looked awkwardly from Graw to Agatha, then back again. It was evident that he had been running.

Agatha was the first to speak.

"What is it?"

"Nothing, ma'am," Downs answered. He was losing no time on civility. He turned to Graw. "I'd like to see you, sir."

Mrs. Frail and Elin Carstairs had also come out on the terrace, Hugh Frail following close afterward.

The former Princess Viatka made her bare shoulders tremble with a little "Bur-r-r!" For a moment she stood very straight with her head up as though sensing all that lay beyond her range of vision. Then again that "Bur-r-r!"

"Oh, how I love a night like this," she whispered, more to herself than to any one else. "What dreadful things might happen!" She turned to Elin Carstairs. "And you never, never feel frightened here in the country at night?"

"Never," Elin replied, with a caress of both voice and hand. "The day and night are not so different, except that possibly the day is the more beautiful."

The former Princess Viatka again sent her interest out into the sable darkness. It was quite apparent that she never, never would understand this future daughter-in-law of hers.

Out there in the night there lay such magnificent possibilities. She thought of Sergius, of Turga—of Turga, odd-

ly, most of all; of him and the family curse.

It was very strange—undoubtedly strange; and it proved so wonderfully those secret beliefs of hers. Had she not sent Turga that winged dollar, and had he not thereupon completely disappeared? She marveled over it, now, for the hundredth time.

For, quite unbeknown to any one else, she had been at some pains to locate Turga. He had interested her. He would have gone far to mitigate this new loneliness of hers. But he had disappeared. She had mailed him the dollar that night, and lo! the very next day he was gone.

She had made secret inquiry at his apartment, had asked indirectly at the clubs as he was wont to frequent. All in vain. This was magic.

Oh, if something dreadful should happen—now, to-night, something to break this submerging monotony!

She started. Faintly, far away, she had heard a whistle. It came to her like the signal of a ghost—of a ghost of her youth. Some one had whistled like that years ago—she could not remember who, nor just when.

Silence had fallen upon the little group. Behind them reared the solemn grandeur of the old house—itsself merging into night, save for those few lighted windows. After all, there had been something in that ancient curse. If it could only have given tongue to the stories of what had happened there! Tragedy and tears—as Chivers had said.

Even the buoyant nature of Elin Carstairs had fallen under the momentary spell. She also knew many things not altogether engulfed in the past—a whole series of events which stood out pale and ghostly, like the stone pilasters of the balustrade.

"Where is Fred?" asked Frail.

Agatha didn't answer. She was still under the influence of what she had felt, of what he had told her, of the sudden advent of Mr. Downs with his message of mystery.

Her mother turned to her and spoke softly.

"Does he still insist that all superstitions are foolish?" she asked, curiously.

Agatha laughed uneasily. They had kept their secret—she and her husband—but some impulse moved her to tell it now.

"To such an extent," she answered, "that he even insists on carrying with him—"

"What?"

There was no mistaking the delicious thrill of anticipation in Mrs. Frail's question. Her native quality of intuition was somehow never so keen.

"Where is Fred?" Frail repeated.

Mother and sister still ignored him. They had very much in common, different though they were in many respects.

"What—not the —"

"Yes, he has it—the *thaler*—Chivvers gave it to him. It was the day his father died."

Agatha whispered her answer in a tremulous voice.

Other members of the party sauntered out of the house into the grateful darkness—the beautiful Gorot twins, herded close by Steinmetz and an *attaché* mixing French and German, the Goodwood's undivorced but severely apart, Bob Willoughby and Aubrey van Trine—but the darkness swallowed them, the silence absorbed their voices.

Even the music of the orchestra sounded faint and far away—a minor wail with something about it suggestive, at least to one member of the family group, of the fantastic witchery of a hurdy-gurdy.

"Where is Fred?" Frail asked once more in exasperation.

Both Agatha and her mother turned with sudden realization of what the question might mean. They stood there looking at each other palpitant, not knowing what to say.

Suddenly, the great silence which enveloped the park was broken by a medley of voices—the voices of men in

hot altercation. They strained their ears to hear.

There came a shot, a howl of rage and pain.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE CAMP OF THE BRETHREN.

THE band of Bohemians who had been employed in pushing the new lake along toward completion had pitched their camp in a rocky grove just beyond the iron fence that encircled the estate. They preferred to live that way.

It was but a continuation of the half-wild life they had left behind them in their native hills. They were more at home like that, for rocks are rocks, the trees are trees the world over. The same sky was their canopy. The same breezes whispered the same secrets of the pagan gods whom their ancestors had worshipped.

It was the old witch who had selected the camp-site. It was she who, in some inscrutable way, had secured them their present employment.

They asked no question. They were as much the children of destiny as were the grasses and the flowers. It was almost as though they had no individual souls—that one soul was enough for all of them as one soul might be enough for a pack of wolves.

But for some time now even the dullest of them had felt the imminence of some change. There had come among them, greeted them as brothers and sisters, a black-bearded stranger by the name of Sergius. His coming had been foretold. They made him welcome in their barbaric camp.

It was to this camp that Turga came in the night. Him also they greeted not only as brother, but as something more. The grandmother had babbled much about him before she died. They did not understand it all, but they knew that he was of the hierarchy—in some way in league with their pagan deities. And he was their brother.



They had made him welcome with a sort of fearful joviality. There were men and women—a tribe—the same people whom he had seen that night of the Witches' Sabbath in the old Frail warehouse—the one that had been burned.

They asked him no questions, nor did he ask any. As it had been at the Carstairs gate, so it was now. There was no occasion for questions. They were all as those who understood.

Upon them all was the invisible hand; but he, Turga, was the elect—the bridegroom of impending fate.

They treated him kindly. They talked about their affairs in his presence as though he had always been one of them. He was filled with a sort of solemn gratitude. He was no longer alone. These were his people.

There was much talk of a strike, still more talk of violence—a sort of greedy eagerness for all the benefits which might accrue in case there was violence. There was vast wealth in the *Schloss*—they called it "*Schloss Frelinghuysen*," as though they were still back in the country of their origin.

And as Turga listened he began to get his first definite perception of what was possibly in store. He found himself listening with increasing eagerness. His recent dejection gradually dissolved.

In its place there came something of savage optimism. Life was not so altogether dark after all. Two women there were in the world whom he had desired with all his heart. He had cursed fate, yet here was fate throwing the cards at last that he might win.

An isolated country mansion, no one to defend it except a company of servants—poltroons to a man, as servants always were—and then, he himself master of this band of brothers, themselves as savage and eager for rapine as a band of famished wolves.

The answer was obvious. He had but to take what was thrown his way.

There was a fire burning there in the open, for the night was cool; and be-

fore this he sat on a box that some one had supplied for his comfort. Now and then, he heard himself add some word to the discussion, knew that he was playing his part in the drama which was now drawing rapidly near its final scene.

It must have been almost dawn when a dark-eyed sister of the tribe brought him a bowl filled with some fragrant beverage of which he drank.

A little later he had crept into a small cabin—a place which would have made him shudder only a day or so previously, but which he now accepted as unquestioningly as he had accepted this new-found fellowship, with the same sense of solemn gratitude.

When he again awoke, the sun was already in the west. He turned his face to it, muttered some odd, half-articulate prayer that fluttered into his consciousness from the back of his brain.

This was to be the night. What it held for him, he neither knew nor cared. He was but the mote in the sunbeam, that or the blind bat zigzagging in the moonlit night.

Unshaven, unkempt, careless as to his appearance in a way that he had never been before there was that about him that would have made almost any woman look twice. It wasn't surprising that the dark-eyed sister of the tribe looked at him so long.

But why she should have struck her forehead and her breast like that, in the age-old gesture of silent grief?

## CHAPTER LIV.

### THE COILED SNAKE.

It was all arranged.

There was to be an attack on the mansion that night. They would take the place by surprise, could do as they wished. There would be rich loot—enough for every one. And to him, to Turga, the lord-prince, the only power on earth they recognized since grandmother's death, and him because

he was the bridegroom of Fate—he should have his heart's desire.

Agatha—Elin!

He was still in doubt. Both of them he hated with a savage hate. Both of them he loved with more than a savage love. With either of them in his power, he told himself, he could be happy.

He was not bothering about the future. He had learned the futility of that. But he had some indefinite dream of a wild flight to the Piesen Hills—the rocky, wooded country of his origin; of life there, lawless and unrestrained.

A man with a black beard, whom he had noticed with the band on the preceding evening, appeared before him out of the gloaming.

For a moment they looked at each other in silence. Then the stranger spoke:

"Great times ahead, brother."

"Yes," Turga answered. A quaver of illumination appeared on the rim of his consciousness. "Yes, great times; even death, perhaps!"

The black-bearded stranger contemplated him soberly.

"I go to keep a tryst with the Princess Viatka," he went on. "I have come far to find her. She does not suspect that I am here, yet nevertheless she is ready."

"You are neither lucky nor unlucky," Turga answered. "For myself, I see not one but three."

"They are?"

"One is the daughter of the Princess Viatka—her name is Agatha. The other is a girl with blue eyes and yellow hair—angel or devil I can't decide. No one can, the difference is so slight. Her name is Elin. The third is better than either of them, more beautiful—a witch, a kind-hearted siren, a *Kishev-Macher* who deals in none but white magic."

Turga paused.

"And what's her name?" the stranger asked.

"Death!"

"You're a worthy head of the

brotherhood," the man with the black beard answered seriously. "I don't want you to kiss this white bride of yours yet for a while."

"Listen! I love you. It is as though you were my son. I might have had a son like you, had destiny so willed it; for there was once a daughter of the last Count Frelinghuysen whom I might have married."

A slight spasm of pain twitched his face. He seemed to be on the point of saying something more, but other members of the clan had drawn forward—a score of them, a rough-looking crew still in their earth-stained clothes—and he desisted. By common accord they all started in the direction of the park.

A hollow had been burrowed under the iron fence and through this they passed. Inside, they paused. The dark-bearded stranger had spoken to other members of the band. Again he approached Turga, put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"What now?" asked Turga.

"We'll attack the house—loot it, each take what he most desires," said the man. "But as we can't spare you—we don't want you to get killed. What you said a little while ago has frightened us. Promise me that you will do as we ask or we won't go forward."

"Whether I promise or not," Turga responded, "everything will be as it will be."

"But you promise?"

"I promise."

"There is a certain place where you will remain and wait for me. I know what you want. You'll get it. I'll see to that."

It had fallen very dark. Clouds banked the sky. The air was oppressive with a promise of storm.

They moved softly over the turf. Through the great silence filtered the distant strains of the orchestra—a wildly cadenced air with something about it that brought back to Turga's mind the music of the old hurdy-gurdy

player in Mme. Zidek's restaurant. Where was Paulo now? he wondered. He had a premonition that he would see him again before very long.

They came to the border of the new lake, followed this in the direction of the river, then crossed over the granite ridge—all that remained to keep the waters from rushing into the new bed that had been prepared for them.

Here the man with the black beard and another member of the band drew Turga somewhat apart.

"This would be the safest place, you say?" the man with the black beard queried.

"Yes."

"But the place is filled with dynamite," he protested with a soft laugh.

"That's all right," the other answered. "The wire is disconnected. I cut it myself this afternoon."

"You wait here," said the man with the black beard, turning to Turga. "I can find you here. Otherwise, I might miss you in the park. Wait here and have no fear. You'll get what you want."

Turga didn't protest. He felt that never again, as long as he lived, would he protest. It was very foolish to protest.

What was a protest of one human atom against the cosmic march of things? As well might he protest against the revolution of the earth on its axis, against the infinite swing of the moon and the stars.

Without a word, passively, he sat down on the granite with his feet in the crowding turf. They went away and left him there. He was as much alone, he felt, as though he were the last man, on the last inhabited sphere, on the last frontier of time.

His foot touched something hard but resilient in the grass. He leaned forward and peered down through the darkness. It was a piece of insulated wire—freshly cut.

He dropped it back again.

After all, what bride could ever be the paragon of that kind-hearted siren

to whom all men turned at last, the witch who deals in none but white magic?

## CHAPTER LV.

### THE HOUR OF DREAD.

THOSE on the terrace of the great house were still waiting for something to follow the shot and the cry. Out from the house came the incongruous music of the orchestra.

The guests were not alarmed. They were merely interested. But it was otherwise with Frail, with Elin Carstairs, with Agatha and her mother.

They were still standing there with that sinister question ringing in their ears—"Where is Fred?"—when the answer came.

It was Graw himself. He ran toward him out of the darkness strangely disfigured. They saw the reason for it. There was a gash across his forehead, from which the blood streamed in spite of his efforts to keep it back.

There was a chorus of exclamations.

"Get into the house—all of you," he panted.

Other members of the party were hurrying forward—with all the speed that perfect breeding would permit—but it was neither the time nor the place for explanations.

"Inside—all of you," Graw repeated.

He huddled them in. Already Chivvers had sensed the danger. He had been so long in the family that nothing was capable of taking him altogether by surprise.

Before the iron shutters were closed on the last window a rock hurtled out of the darkness, crashed through the glass, and struck a chandelier.

"Shall I arm the servants, sir?" asked Chivvers.

"With anything you want to except firearms," Graw replied. "Hugh and I will do any shooting that's necessary. Scatter them at the windows, Chiv-

vers. Let them report to us in case anything breaks."

He faced the others.

"Now, don't get excited," he commanded, with a smile. "This will be a godsend for all of you—give you something to talk about for the rest of your lives. Nothing but a strike or something like that.

"Adolph"—turning to a servant—"tell that orchestra to go on. And now you girls go and play bridge, dance—do anything you want to except look out of the windows. There's a strike, some drunken workmen. Some one kindly tapped me on the head in the dark with a club.

"Downs fired a shot. He is off to the stables. Everything will be lovely again within half an hour. Steinmetz—you're a soldier—you come with Hugh and me. You other men—stay here with the ladies and help them have a good time."

"*Hoch, der general!*" cried Steinmetz.

"Telephone for the police—for the sheriff," said Hugh when they were alone.

"We'll try," Graw answered; "but I'm afraid it is too late. They were cutting the wires when Downs and I surprised them. You go to the armory—get us each a shotgun."

"What, ho," Frail answered cheerfully.

He was a very different Frail from the youth who had borne that name a few months ago.

Steinmetz wasn't aware yet what it was all about; but he was ready to fight—whatever it was, whatever the odds. In a few words Graw explained the situation.

"The mine—now is the time to shoot your mine," Steinmetz suggested. "It would scare them off. It would send the water into the lake, into the moat—even if it blew up a few, should drown a few, as I suggested this afternoon."

He had moved over to the battery, looked down at it fondly.

Graw was beside him with his hand on his arm.

"Later, colonel, if we must."

"Is the coast all clear—none of your own people about?"

"None at this time."

"I have a peculiar feeling," Colonel Steinmetz remarked. "A peculiar feeling. You say they cut the telephone-wires—and this—"

Slowly he put out his hand and touched the rheostat. It hovered there for a moment. He pushed the lever slowly down.

Graw had ceased to breathe. But no explosion followed.

"As I suspected," said Steinmetz, with perfect calm.

Back in the drawing-room, where the rest of the party hovered, both fear and suspense were in the air. Obedient to orders, the leader of the orchestra still conducted his men, but perspiring distraction had fallen upon them all. There were unnoticed discords. An E-string snapped on the first violin. They jumped, to a man, as though it had been another shot.

The former Princess Viatka was in a quiver which had in it the elements of both distress and exquisite delight. Not since she had come to the country with the family had she taken a keener interest in life. Life! This was life as she understood it, loved it, and not otherwise.

She had moved somewhat apart, praying inwardly for the final crash that she was expecting. She was listening with all her ears.

There—she thought she had heard it again, that peculiar whistle she had heard but a little while before. While she cast a quick glance round her—caught an impression of frightened faces, of agitated shoulders, of imminent hysteria in a dozen forms. No one would see her—that much was certain.

She slipped out into the hall. No one was there. She put her hand on her bare breast.

Sergius—it was Sergius calling to

her, as he had called to her years ago when Horace was still alive, when she was still the chatelaine of Schloss Frelinghuysen in dear Bohemia.

"Ah, *Dieu!*—and why not?"

She slipped over to the front door, opened it, peered out into the night. There was darkness there—a whispering suggestion of things unseen, of unseen perils, of lurking joys.

Some one whispered her name.

She had stepped outside.

The door swung softly shut behind her with the tiny, fateful click of a spring-lock.

## CHAPTER LVI.

### "THE WINGED DOLLAR."

THE rioters had set fire to the stables. As Graw crept out of a window of an upper story a few minutes later onto the top of a small stone porch he saw a quivering plume of flame shoot up, multiply, sink, then leap higher than ever.

He groaned within himself. He would have to trust Downs and the other employees to protect themselves and the live-stock. He couldn't leave the house.

He had brought a shotgun with him. Hugh he had sent, also armed, to a vantage-point at the front of the house. Steinmetz was in complete command of the lower floor.

He thought of his father. He thought of the historic curse of this family which he had made his own. His jaw came out. He couldn't stand this inactivity much longer.

But as he wavered—as he watched the growing conflagration, thought of all those in the house for whose safety he was responsible—Agatha crept out beside him.

"Fire!" she sobbed.

"You're safe," he whispered.

He cautiously shifted the shotgun to his other hand, patted her gently on the shoulder, and ordered her to go back.

"I can't find mama," she whispered, "and I'm so frightened. What do you see?"

"Nothing but a few men prowling about," he whispered in reply. "But I won't shoot them for that."

"Have you still the dollar?"

"Yes."

"Throw it away."

"That hasn't anything to do with it."

"I know, only—I wish you would."

"Superstition," he whispered.

"I can't help it," Agatha answered. "It's all as you say, I know. But it has got the curse on it. Oh, this is the curse—I know! I know!"

In the darkness Graw could feel her tremble. With his eyes still on the fire, he encircled her with his arm, brushed her face with a hasty caress.

"As you will!" he exclaimed softly.

He had disengaged his hand, felt the coin in his pocket, drew it forth. In the dancing, fitful light he could see the white shimmer of it. So could Agatha.

It was as though all the terror she had thus far experienced that night was concentrated in that small disk—an evil eye of fearful potency.

"Throw it away!" she begged again.

Graw hesitated, still looking down at the coin. It was an evil-looking thing. Something of Agatha's terror crept into his own heart. Wasn't his continued defiance of the old superstition but another form of superstition on his own part? Besides, Agatha had given him the best of reasons—it was something that added to her distress.

"Throw it away!" she begged. "You'll see. Perhaps it's already spinning some evil influence upon you—something that will disappear when it disappears."

Agatha, like many a woman when she speaks like that, was hovering very close to a truth she wouldn't have spoken for worlds. The coin had made her think of Turga—the

handsome, fascinating, ill-omened Turga. It was because of him that the coin filled her now with an added fear.

Did Graw sense the truth?

Careless of exposure, he had suddenly got upon his feet, stood there with the gun in one hand, the coin in the other, gazing out ahead of him.

Then he unlimbered his strength, poised himself for a throw—Ajax defying the lightning.

Agatha trembled, held her breath. Some mighty thing was about to take place.

Graw threw the coin out into the night with all his strength.

Turga had been sitting where the brethren had left him. Upon him had fallen a pall as sable as the night—black, impenetrable, immensely solemn.

He heard the shot, the cry.

It was evident that the marauders had not been able to carry out their first purpose of a surprise. It brought to him but an added weight of confirmation that Fate was against him; that he and all those who were connected with him were to be the victims of Fate and not its allies.

Lo, was it not ever thus?

He had never thought much about moral questions. But suddenly there came to him, like the voices of an invisible choir, a chant the words of which he could not understand, but which he knew were the expression of old, immutable truths—truths that had inspired every religion, every aspiration, since the world began.

He stood up. He lifted his face to the sky. It was not that old pagan prayer to the setting sun that came to his lips now. It was something else—something he tried so hard to express.

"Oh, God—God—"

He paused. He sought for utterance.

He saw the red flames of the burning stable suddenly reach up, whirling in a diabolical dance—a final memento

of the saraband he had witnessed that night—so long ago, it seemed—when Paulo had led him to hear the story of his haunted legacy.

A slight tremor ran through his slender frame. Once more he lifted his face to the black heavens. It was a final appeal. He strove to express what was in his heart. After all, it wasn't fear. After all, it was resignation.

"Behold, I am ready!"

He stood there very straight, his feet planted on the granite ridge, his face still lifted, the infinite in his mind and heart.

It was there that he kept his tryst with the white bride—the kind-hearted siren to whom all men—and all women, and even the little children—turn at last.

There at his feet lay the severed wire.

The winged dollar soared upward through the night, then began its swift descent.

Who shall say that it was Graw's hand, and not the invisible hand which Turga in his young life had come to know so well, that gave it guidance?

Just there, where the two ends of the severed wire almost touched each other, it fell and completed the deadly contact.

"Behold, I am ready!"

The words were still on Turga's lips when he heard the padded thud of the coin.

Followed instantly annihilation, the crash of doom!

Graw and Agatha stood there motionless, breathless, expectant. Then, scarcely had the dollar disappeared, it had seemed, when there had come that mighty explosion.

Agatha had uttered a little shriek.

Graw had caught her to him, for even his robust nerves had been shaken by the uncanniness of the thing.

There came a sound of cheering from the stable, the hiss of steam.



Down there they had begun to fight the fire.

Two or three men came into view, running along the path. Graw recognized Downs and called out to him.

"They've gone," the overseer answered. "It was the explosion, I guess, that frightened them away."

Suddenly they were all listening. Even above the noise that came from the stables the lesser sounds that came from below stairs, where there was still some semblance of music and conversation, there was audible a new element of sound—a soft roar, the whispering rush of water.

The little river that ran through the Frail estate was pouring into the new lake.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### CONCLUSION.

THERE have been a number of changes on the face of things since the events herewith recorded took place. The face of things, like the faces of persons, will take on repose and tranquillity with the passage of time.

It may have been coincidence, of course; but it is true that all trace of the legendary Frelinghuysen curse disappeared utterly on that eventful night when Frederic Graw hurled the last materialization of the Frelinghuysen *thaler* into space.

It was never heard of nor seen again—no more than was Turga. The granite barrier between river and lake had been shattered. The living waters before dawn had encircled the old house to keep all bad ghosts away from it forevermore.

Poor Turga!

They often talked about him. They often wondered what had become of him. None of them knew anything about that supreme adventure of his when he stood on the mined rock in the park that night and sent up his last message—"I am ready!"

He disappeared utterly—as all men will some day—became a memory, not all good, not all bad—as is the case with other men as well.

There might have been those among the odd brotherhood who had participated in that fruitless foray who could have cast light on Turga's tragic end, but they never did so. For no less did the explosion shatter the granite rock than it shattered the bond that had held these strange men one to another.

The members of the brotherhood had simply disappeared—scattered as the rock had been in all directions. Perhaps, like the fragments of the rock itself, they also came to serve a useful purpose at last, each in his own way. Not always in union is there strength.

The former Princess Viatka had likewise disappeared that night.

At first this was the cause of untold anxiety, naturally. But, little by little, they all came to believe the story originally told by one of the under-servants—that he had seen his mistress greet a black-bearded stranger in front of the house, had seen her in his arms, had seen her follow him, a willing prisoner.

For every now and then some renaescent spirit of maternity inspires her to write to them—now from Vienna, now from Florence, now from Paris. She says always that she is very happy; that her husband's name is Sergius, and that some day—meaning never—he and she will come to visit them.

For there would be little enough in the lives of her children now to attract the exotic temperament of that lady—even if she is a grandmother.

Notwithstanding that single night of terror, Hugh and Elin were happily married. Their lives, like those of Agatha and Frederic Graw, have attained the ideal. Let each in his own way imagine of what that ideal consists.

The town-house of the Frails was

torn down long ago to give place to one of those new department-stores—so rich in everything except shadowy tradition.

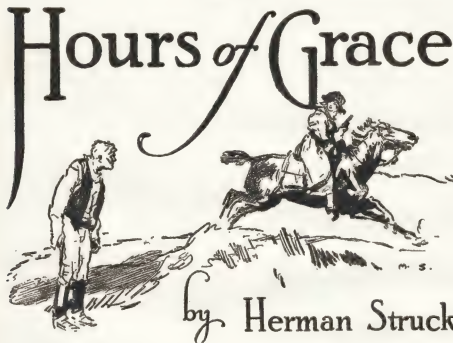
Even the country-place has been greatly changed—a convalescent home for crippled children, still presided over by the saintly Dr. Carstairs, richly endowed by the—not the last—descendant of the wicked old fugitive who built it; also by his brother-in-

law. They can well afford it. They have prospered exceedingly in many ways.

And then, as the mother of Paulo once said, you can always counteract a curse—or, for that matter, any other of the devil's works—with some good deed.

And with all that is left of the ancient line of the Frelinghuysens, this has become a chief article of faith.

(The End.)



**I**N Ukiah, the new-born county seat, they were favorably known as "the vigilance committee."

The mothers of that village upheld them before their growing sons as the protectors of California's frontier, and as being worthy of zealous imitation.

With less sentiment, the new court supported that estimation to the extent that it neglected to investigate several cases which the vigilance committee had tried and settled in its own informal way.

When at home, in northern Mendocino, the official title of these range-lords was ignored by a number

of small "nesters" and changed to "Stringer's Band."

The ridicule was lost upon the good people of Ukiah. The committee in general helplessly adopted the view of its leaders—old Joseph Stringer and his son "Red"—who held that whatever the home-title lacked in collective dignity, it more than balanced in personal fitness.

Of all men who had justly or unjustly felt the power of Stringer's Band, perhaps no one could speak from greater experience of its thoroughness and despatch in forcing a desired end than Jack Keel, a young adventurer and stockman of southern Trinity.

When he fell for the second time into their hands he soberly permitted himself to weigh the chances against him.

Pete Martin, deeply impressed with the importance of his official act, had brought Keel to the Martin cabin, and, as befitted a dangerous criminal, tied him, hands to back, to a post of the heavy hewn-oak bedstead. There he left him in charge of Mrs. Martin, while he, himself, rode off to round up his fellow-members of the committee that they might sit in judgement—if, indeed, Pete reflected, they would consider the murderer of one of the elect deserving a sitting!

This question was one of the chances Keel weighed as he sat with his back to the bed-post studying the reserve of Mrs. Martin, who calmly went about her work in the kitchen.

She was middle-aged, with thin gray hair drawn back tightly to a knot, accentuating the prominence of cheek-bones and ears, giving the head an angularity in keeping with her five feet eleven inches of unloveliness. His slight acquaintance with her in the past had not taught him to penetrate her habitual reserve.

As he speculated as to what sentiments might be beneath it, he half felt that, in her assumed indifference, she did judge him, but only so far as he judged himself. With an unconcern, betraying no recognition of her prisoner, he watched her take the rifle which her husband had significantly leaned within her reach, throw out the cartridge, and hang the gun on its pegs upon the neat log wall.

The plan upon which he had been focusing his observations seemed quite hopeless, but with an effort that cost him many drops of sweat—it was a warm June evening—he came to the point of addressing her, and he cleared his throat suggestively.

"Mrs. Martin," he began with deference, "when you have a few minutes' spare time, could I speak with you?"

Without replying, the woman

stepped leisurely to the stone-walled oven, rearranged some pots, and then came to him.

"I wish you would tell me first," he said, "has anything of importance happened in the neighborhood while I was in prison?"

She searched his drawn, eager face. "Speak plain, Keel," she said not unkindly. "What do you want to know?"

"Has anybody died?"

"The Mitchell baby—last winter."

"Anybody married?"

"No."

He looked out through the open window and his gaze rested vacantly on the distant blue of the Coast Range. When he turned to her his voice was apologetic.

"Is Louise—Miss Summers—still here?"

"Louise came home to her father's ranch some weeks ago. She's been studying music in the East while you were away."

"Do you think she would be at home to-night?"

"I think so."

Mrs. Martin regarded him curiously and intently. Her wide, thin lips were sensitive at the corners. He was grateful for the scarcely perceptible twitching of those mouth-corners, and, altogether, he felt somewhat encouraged to continue.

"I'm going to ask you to do a pretty hard thing for me," he said. "It'll bring you into trouble for a few hours—but only for a few hours. I give you my word. By the way—" he exclaimed as a conflicting thought rose, "do you put any value on my word? Tell me, do you think I was guilty of the charges Red Stringer and his father's gang used to run me to San Quentin?"

"You're not here to answer those charges. Did you kill Red Stringer this afternoon?"

"I did. I'm sorry it happened. But that isn't what I am getting at. Killing a man is one thing, having

one's character questioned is another; the distinction touches me pretty keen just now. You know the statements I made during my trial. If you think with Pete and the others that I'm a liar, be frank about it, and in that case I'd rather not ask of you what I intended."

He sank his head and saw a drop of sweat roll from his nose to spatter on his dust-coated boot; and he moistened his lips with his tongue.

Mrs. Martin, in spite of her seeming disregard for trifles, was an observer of details. She went to the kitchen, returned with a tin dipper full of cold water, and, to overcome his inability to use his hands, held it carefully to his lips until he drained it.

"I'm in a position to judge your character," he said thankfully.

She ignored the remark and the tone.

"It's no secret that Pete Martin has worked with young Stringer against you," she said. "I've never defended you because I had no proof. But for all that, I've never doubted your honesty."

"I don't suppose you know," he asked apprehensively, "if Miss Summers has ever expressed herself on this matter?"

"So far's I know, she has never mentioned your name."

"I didn't expect it," he said with a wince of disappointment. "She scarcely knows me. Shortly before they got me, I rode home with her from Wilson's social. Red thought that was his right."

"That was the first time I met her, and Red had it figured out that it should be my last, so he concocted that horse-stealing scheme, and brought up the sheriff to trap me in circumstantial evidence. I was discharged last Tuesday."

"At noon I was riding down the Eel River grade on my way to Summer's ranch. At the ford I met Red Stringer. I asked him a question

about Miss Summers, and when he answered me as he did, I told him what I calculated would drive him to his gun.

"It's useless to talk. It's all over and I'll pay the bill. But before I pay—it'll be several hours before old Stringer and his bunch get here—I want a last favor.

"I was on my way to see her—Louise. For those five prison years I've had my mind set upon seeing her when I would be free—every day of the five years. At night I slept with that hope. And now, while I have a few hours to wait, if you could arrange, I should like to see her, Mrs. Martin. I'll be back at twelve. I'll meet the men here at midnight."

Mrs. Martin went to the window. It seemed to Keel hours that she stood there motionless with her back turned to him. His eyes did not leave her head and yet he did not see it; his mind, his whole being, was straining to penetrate that calm exterior, to read her thoughts.

When she turned again and walked thoughtfully past him to tend the kitchen fire he looked in vain for an answer in her sensitive mouth- corners.

He felt his pulses pounding under the rawhide cords. The throbbing echoed in his temples and set his head burning with rage. For a moment he was sure that leather and wood could not hold him, and for that brief moment, which seemed, in its demand upon last resources, the critical one for which his past life had prepared him, he experienced a certain fierce joy in the fond exaggeration of his long, muscular limbs.

He threw himself forward from the stool on which he sat. There was a crash of breaking wood, and he fell headlong to the floor, taking half the bedstead with him. He wrenched again at the cords as he lay, but they cut to the wrist-bones and held fast.

As he rose limp and dazed to his feet he faced Mrs. Martin. Her hard

eyes read defeat in his whole figure, and he knew it, so he turned slowly from her and sat down on his overturned stool.

It was as if Mrs. Martin called him out of a trance when she spoke.

"I have your word," she said, "that you'll be back here at twelve o'clock?"

He rose, lifting the broken bedstead with him.

"I'll be here at twelve."

She brought a knife and cut the straps that held him. Then she led him to the kitchen to bathe his lacerated wrists. But that operation he soon escaped as a trifle; it was his unutterable gratitude that pained him. She read his thoughts as, hat in hand, he finally stood before her.

"Run along," she said. "You have nothing to thank me for."

He started to go, but turned impulsively back, seized one of her bony hands and pressed it to his lips. Then he walked out to his mare.

As he covered the first few miles to the Summers ranch his mind played upon the approaching meeting with Louise. Some inner voice—or was it but a vain echo of his hopes?—told him that she would judge him as Mrs. Martin had done.

He dared not expect that she would meet him as a friend. But of this he was certain, and to this point he always returned for firm footing when besieged by dark apprehensions—she would respect his mission. Although he had been but a few hours in her company, he understood her.

It required no extraordinary intuition to detect her inherent refinement. Being a young woman of ideals, rising from an appreciation of all that is beautiful and gentle, he reasoned, she could not love one who had squandered his inheritance of culture and had become calloused in the range game with no other standard than the survival of the fittest.

But her gentleness, he thought, that would shrink at his hardness,

might pity him for the failing. Even to be pitied by her—to see it in her eyes—would be a privilege a more deserving man could envy.

With these thoughts he entered a thickly wooded stretch where the evening already settled in the more sheltered ravines, and where, on the exposed ridges, the filtered rays of the low sun splashed vividly on the great red arms of the madronas.

He remembered other times when he had ridden through this patch of forest, and he remembered countless times when, watching his flying shuttle in the prison jute-mill—sweating in his stripes amid the deafening roar of machinery—he had been, in fancy, where he now was—in the cool, green quiet where wounded spirits heal.

With the abruptness of these northern California ranges, the trail led him up a steep, bald ridge and then lost itself in a gradual descent over fairly open sweeps to the Eel Cañon. Beyond, where the Eel River crept like a broken silver thread, the mountains rose, a blue jagged wall behind which the sun was half hidden.

It had been one of his prison dreams to ride his horse upon a lone rock-group rising before him like the ruins of an ancient turret some thirty feet above the bald hilltop. He had no time now to carry out this wish, and he was about to pass the rock when he jerked in his mare and drove her in a few leaps to the summit.

As he sat there, feeling in the surrounding vastness the key-note of his nature, the thought that came to him was not an accidental one. Since Mrs. Martin had paroled him that thought had lain suppressed in his mind; and now, with a taste for self-torture, he deliberately dwelt upon it.

He drew a parallel between his remaining life and the segment of fire slipping behind the blue wall into the Pacific beyond. He did not care to escape the course of the "eye for eye" law to which he had gladly bound himself when he shot Stringer;

he did not upbraid himself for his consistency. Still, he could not but feel a poignant self-pity; the wish to live was crying strong within him.

He had come to his haunts like a wild thing untamed by confinement, eager to experience the merited joys of freedom. But he was not sure that another sun would shine upon his experiences.

He had a mental glimpse of Joseph Stringer, the dead man's father, forcing his lathered horse in the lead of his retainers, bound for Martin's cabin. The old man's trembling lips, drawn to a snarl, mumbled something that Keel could not misunderstand nor wholly disrespect.

At midnight they would meet!

He descended from the rock, impressed with the value of the fleeting minutes which were his only until twelve. Their value was but for one purpose—to see Louise! To the rhythm of the mare's downward leaps the phrase ran through his mind—"to see Louise—to see Louise."

It was growing dark when he reached Summers's gate. He closed it behind him and walked his sorrel to the hitching-rack by the barn. For no apparent reason he hoped no one had seen his coming, and he felt a choking sensation which increased when he dismounted.

Looking neither to right nor left, he walked with studied ease to avoid the clink of spurs, taking grateful advantage of a poplar row which led him unobserved to the vine-enclosed porch of the ranch house.

It was just a glance through the foliage in passing, but in that one glance he saw her.

She was sitting in a low armchair with a book in her lap, looking dreamily out into the night as if continuing in fancy the thread of a romance which the darkness had interrupted. He had an impression of cool, summery white and of matured loveliness.

To a rose he had sometimes com-

pared her—a delicate pink rose, firm and fresh with the dew of morning. Now the comparison flashed again before him.

As he walked, with awe swelling in his throat, to the front porch entrance, she heard his step and stood waiting when he came up.

"I'm Jack Keel," he said shyly. "Maybe you have forgotten."

"Mr. Keel!" she exclaimed in surprise. "It's good of you to let us see you again. Will you come in?"

"Perhaps later—thanks. I was discharged last Tuesday from San Quentin," he added with a regard for fundamentals.

"Since you speak of it," she said, "won't you tell me that you were not guilty of trying to steal Red Stringer's horses?"

"Did you think I was innocent?"

"I thought—yes, I was sure you were innocent. I know it now without your telling me."

"I often wondered what you thought of me."

She had no comment upon this. After a pause she stepped back to turn her chair.

"If you will sit here," she said, "I'll bring another."

"Before I sit I must tell you what may cause you to regret the invitation. It's easier to be scorned\* standing. This noon I shot Red Stringer dead."

She sank to her chair and looked at him with horror and doubt struggling confusedly in her eyes. He met her gaze evenly until she bowed her head and buried her face in her hands.

"It was an accident," she said weakly, as if fearing to be contradicted.

"It was no accident."

"I can't believe it! You—I never thought of you—like that."

She looked to him for a reply. But he stood respectfully and silently returning her look.

"Please say something!" she exclaimed. "Have you nothing to say for yourself? How did it happen?"



Did you do it because he wronged you so?"

"In coming here I hoped we could avoid this discussion. I did wrong—a great wrong—but I didn't do it for revenge."

It was something more in his manner than in his words that changed her view-point.

"I must insist that you tell me," she said. "I feel that I could sympathize with you if you told me all."

"I was on my way to see you when I met him," he explained. "I asked him a question. He answered me. If he had struck me instead of speaking I couldn't have killed him."

"Some insults can be unbearable," she said with deep feeling. "I shall always think that he insulted you beyond all endurance."

A flush of embarrassment came to his face.

"It's not for me to be ungrateful," he replied, scrutinizing his hatband, "but I'd rather not be in your memory as having shot a dog for barking at me."

"I don't understand."

"It was some one else that he insulted."

Keel did not look at her. He felt the regret of knowing that she understood. It was an attempt to lighten the situation when he asked:

"What is the verdict?"

"You are entitled to sit with me," she answered.

"No need of fetching a chair."

He stopped her and motioned her to her seat. He dropped his hat to the floor and sat down beside it on the porch-landing with his back against the post.

She placed her chair so as not to face him squarely and gave superficial attention to a vine-rose, from which she picked now and then a petal. He, as often, looked up at her averted face, which, though normally well colored, was now in the full moonlight nearly white with agitation written in the delicate features. This

agitation, however, as he regretted, was beginning to be marked by a practical decision.

"I see your position," she said finally. "You haven't a minute to lose. The men have all gone to Covelo; but father will be here soon, I think. He should be here now. If you are in haste—as you must be—could I do anything for you? Do you need a fresh horse?"

"I didn't come here to ask help of your father. You alone can help me, and I've no object in seeking your favor beyond the favor itself."

She regarded him with puzzled eagerness.

"At twelve o'clock," he said, drawing the only watch in Mendocino, "I must be back in Martin's cabin to meet Joe Stringer's band—for what I did. I've just an hour that I can call my own—that is, outside of my riding-time. Into this hour I'd like to press the realizations of the hopes of five years. Let me be with you for an hour as your friend."

"I don't understand it," she replied. "I needn't tell you of the past methods of these men who are your enemies. Yet you say you're going back there, and you seem so confident of your position."

"If you refer to my future—which begins at twelve—I see no future. I want to live a lifetime in the present. Please walk with me."

With a little frown, rather of anxiety than displeasure, she consented.

It was a night as he had planned it should be.

There was the scent of blossoming manzanito and a suggestion of wild roses in the air. The moonlight fell upon them and spread over the bush-patched meadow like a benediction of peace.

Occasionally a locust, humming his faint tremolo, paused at their approach until the slow click of spurs had passed his range. There were no other sounds.

Keel breathed long and deep with a

strange exhilaration. About him was a strange, wonderful atmosphere, holding promises of possibilities he dared not fathom.

A sky as this, mountains holding mysteries in haze, wooded ranges blossoming like this, at such an hour, had once upon returning from a gambler's revelry halted him to proclaim such beauties alone worth recognition. Now they seemed but dumb elements of worship toward the woman at his side, and his chest expanded wide to hold the beauty that was hers.

He had not offered his arm when they left the house, because in the light in which he placed himself he could not see why she should wish that formal intimacy. It was, moreover, evident that she needed no assistance to overcome any irregularities of footing—in fact, of the two, he was the most awkward.

In avoiding an overhanging branch he pressed his elbow against her side and drew away, thrilled by a force that choked the apology in his throat. It was not that he was a stranger to women.

In a past almost submerged by ten years' adventuring, he had been a favorite in college social events. But, with pardonable bias, he considered himself a stranger to Louise's type.

They strolled at random over the close-grazed meadow, speaking disconnectedly of commonplace matters—often, it seemed to him, only to shield a deeper thought current which the self-conscious silence threatened to reveal. Even these attempts at displaying a light bearing became less frequent, and he saw in her silence an increasing anxiety that must sooner or later find expression.

It did not surprise him greatly when she touched his arm to stop him and then stepped resolutely before him, facing him.

"This shall go no farther!" she said. "Don't you see the great danger you are in? Aren't you afraid? You should be riding now—away

from these men, for you'll get no justice from them. Don't waste these minutes here and—"

"Miss Summers," Keel interrupted, "let's not go over this again. When, after the shooting, I let Pete Martin lead me away, his prisoner, I adjusted myself to my case. I put it all behind me, and I longed for just one perfect hour without a past or future—only you. This is my hour."

Louise turned and walked a few paces, then waited for him. Absorbed in thought, they strolled on and took a well-beaten path which led them to the pasture-gate, before which they halted.

"Do you care to walk farther?" he asked.

She was leaning her arms on the top gate-bar, and under his questioning look her eyes were lowered.

"Whatever you wish," she whispered. "This is your hour."

And she turned her face slightly from him.

He observed a tremulous heaving of her shoulders. They were shapely, slender shoulders, not made for the contact of a hard hand such as his own, he thought. Her neck seemed but for the caress of soft fingers like hers and for the touch of wavy, luminous hair.

"I have one great wish, my friend," he said, lowering his head to hers. "Would you let me touch you—touch your shoulder?"

She nodded.

He laid his hand upon her very lightly. It was more an instinct than a definite thought that awakened at the touch and made him step back to stand with folded arms.

As he stood there the awakened instinct combated with reason. Reason submitted, and the two forces challenged his pride, and pride, which was strongest in the man, contended that he must not take her in his arms—even for a heartbeat.

It occurred to him that he was taking his departure from the world.

He had come to say farewell to his hopes. All that he knew of heaven was within reach of his arm, and he must leave it without the memory of one exalted moment that he would have staked against the darkest theories of the eternal unknown before him. No—he must take her in his arms before he went! He would ask her.

"Miss Summers"—his voice was unsteady—"I will ask more. If I deserve your scorn send me from you. But afterward remember my disgrace not without a thought of my position."

He paused a full minute, and then said with forced lightness:

"Will you walk with me back to my horse? It's time I was leaving for Martin's."

"I don't want you to go back there!"

"No?"

She turned upon him.

"You must get away from here. I have a brother in Eureka. I'll see that you can change horses at Blocksburg and at Carlotta. You know, ships come to Eureka."

He smiled in spite of himself.

"And then what would you have me do? This is really interesting—board a ship and—"

"Stop this! I'm not jesting!"

"Which is more proof of your goodness. But, even if I were inclined to break an agreement which takes me back to Martin's, who, in that over-the-sea place, do you suppose would care to associate with me, a 'runaway murderer'?"

"Don't say that word! Anybody would welcome you."

"Perhaps anybody would, but do you think your kind would?"

"That's unfair!"

"To be logical?"

"To insinuate that I could be so—so base as to desert a friend."

As they stood facing each other a great light came upon him, and he took the hand resting on the gate.

"Tell me, Louise," he said, "that you didn't speak out of pity alone."

"Listen to me! The other way would—oh, I couldn't bear it! Where is the justice of letting them take your life? No, I'm not speaking out of pity, or for justice, but for myself. The ancient cave woman is speaking."

"Please, for my sake, throw aside—just for to-night—third person principles, and play once more the game that hardened you."

Gripping his arms in her intensity, she continued pleading, and he, to drown this reasoning, which was too dangerously in accord with what was within himself, drew the rebellious little head close to him.

In the silence he felt her whole body quivering with stifled sobs, pleading with eloquence beyond words.

He became aware of receiving from her a new power, which made him straighten, caused his muscles to feel their youth, and the blood to leap in his veins like strong wine.

A cool breath from the Eel Cañon met his brow and passed through his hair.

He lifted the woman to his lips as he would a child.

"Come, girl," he said, "you and I for the horses!"

Hand in hand, they hastened to the barn.

It was a matter of a few minutes for Keel to saddle two fresh horses and lead them to the house where Louise had prepared a small package of provisions and written a note of explanation to her father. They were soon cantering northward over the Eureka trail, which ran up from the southeast past the Martin ranch.

"Stringer and his men will follow us," Louise said when the horses slackened to a walk on the first steep grade. "Do they know that you came here?"

"Mrs. Martin knows."

"She alone? Does she know why you came?"

"She knows."

"Then we're safe!" Louise sighed. "I know Mrs. Martin."

Keel halted. She wonderingly reined in and turned back to him. He rested his elbow on the saddle-horn with his chin sunk in his hand.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Come; every minute is precious."

"Don't hurry, Louise," he replied meditatively. "I suppose you are quite intimate with Mrs. Martin?"

"Since mother died she has often taken mother's place. But let's ride on and speak of that good woman."

"Let me tell you something about her," he said without moving. "I let Pete Martin pick me up at the shooting. He brought me to his cabin and told his wife to hold me, 'dead or alive,' while he rounded up Joe Stringer's bunch. I told her I wished to see you before seeing Stringer, and I promised to be back at twelve if she would let me off."

"You can see her position. Well, she let me off. Try to forgive me for making you suffer through my weakness. But I must go back. Ride with me to your father's gate, and there let me leave you. I must be back at twelve!"

She could not speak, but her fingers gripped tight upon his rein. He drew the small, clenched hand to him and then gently unclasped one struggling finger after another.

"I'll not leave you!" she cried. "If you are determined to go, I go with you!"

"You shall not come to Martin's cabin," he said quietly. "Will you turn back a half mile this side of it?"

"Perhaps," she answered evasively.

"That won't do, Louise!"

She hung her head and glanced up at him demurely, toying the while absently with one of his knotty fingers.

"Then," she said evenly, "I must be frank and say that I'll do just as I please."

"Please to do me this last kindness! Martin's cabin, to-night, is no place for a woman."

"It's useless to argue."

The finality of her tone was unmistakable.

He tried with more pleading to move her from her purpose, but without effect. It was with a heavy heart that he started back with her toward the Martin ranch.

In passing Louise's home, thinking that he might yet persuade her, he dismounted and begged her again in vain to leave him. There was nothing else for him to do than to resign himself to his dilemma and to be happy in her company.

They rode side by side over the open stretches. When in the wooded parts the trail narrowed, he asked her to lead, because he loved to watch her. She rode with the careless grace of one long accustomed to the saddle, sitting often with her body half turned, looking back at him, while her horse galloped with loose rein the ever-changing trail he knew.

During the five years in prison Keel had trained himself to be a master of illusions when it seemed practical. He now tried to shut out the future with the forced illusion that the ride had no significance other than its present being.

While he sometimes succeeded in disregarding the pressing conviction that he was probably living the last hours of his life, he allowed himself to appreciate the value which that fact gave not only to the speeding minutes, but to all that his life-hungry senses absorbed.

All that he saw about him—the open patches, with their grasses trodden by cattle and deer; the woods, where oaks and madronas grouped to shelter the wild in their shadows; the dew-glistening flowers sown like stars on the hill-sides; and, above all, the girl who, like a dream fairy, rode her white horse before him, plunging from shadow to light and back again into shadow—all these impressions he feverishly gathered as fuel in the last hour of autumn and of time.

His meditations were suddenly interrupted when, at a point about six

miles from the Martin ranch, Louise drew rein and begged him to halt.

"I've been thinking," she said when they came to a stand, "and I see a way out. I've been trying hard not to believe the horrible truth; but I fear now that when we ride in there they won't even give you a hearing. It all depends on my speed in getting there.

"I must be in the cabin at twelve—before they start hunting for you. I'll ride on alone, and you must come in an hour later. It's your one chance to save yourself. Please do this for my sake! Don't make me force you to stay behind!"

Keel's immediate reply was to lean over and kiss the trembling lips. Then he said conclusively: "Impossible!" and started on.

Louise spurred her horse in his way, and from the folds of her riding-skirt drew a small revolver. Before he could interfere she had pressed the gun against the head of his horse and fired. The animal reared, stiffened convulsively, and pitched sidewise to his knees. With accustomed dexterity Keel cleared the saddle, and then, in wordless astonishment, turned upon Louise.

"Forgive me!" she pleaded. "I must get to Martin's first."

She swung her white into course and was soon lost to sight on the wooded trail.

Keel stood motionless, until the sound of speeding hoofs melted into the silence of the night. Then, having assured himself that the horse was dead, he started on a running walk in pursuit of his champion.

In his thoughts he worshiped her for her motive and upbraided her for the folly that would only bring her unnecessary pain. It was with speculations, giving himself unnecessary pain, that the six miles to Martin's cabin were covered. He was not used to walking and running in stiff riding-boots; but physical discomforts were lost in the confusion of his expectations—his fears, not for himself, but for what Louise might experience.

When, at some distance, Martin's dogs announced Keel's approach, he saw eight or ten men crowd out of the cabin-door.

They stood a moment talking excitedly in low tones, and then, as if by sudden agreement, reentered the cabin—except Pete Martin, who waited for Keel to come up.

"We're holdin' a court meetin' in the kitchen," Martin said curtly. "I'll take you round to the sittin'-room. You wait there. Lucky you haven't a gun on you," he added, while his practised eye searched Keel from head to foot.

The prisoner made no reply and followed his warden into the little candle-lighted room, where he seated himself on a bear-skin couch.

Why was Louise not there to greet him? Keel asked himself as he sat alone, pondering. Had she failed? For himself he did not care, but it was painful to imagine that Louise, fighting, in the adjoining room, a crowd of hardened rangers, was feeling the pangs of defeat.

He could hear the sounds of shuffling boots and excited talking coming from the kitchen. The sitting-room clock ticked off five—ten—fifteen minutes while this confusion held on. Then the talking seemed carried on alternately by two, while the others were attentively listening.

Keel tried to recognize the voices, but the heavy dividing door deadened them to low, indistinct mummings. For a time the mumbling burst again into volume, to decrease suddenly to one tense voice emphasized by a man's fist striking the table three times.

This was followed by a silence.

Though he had no clue to the supposition, he was certain that some one was writing. The vigilance committee was orderly, in its own way, and it usually put its verdicts down in writing, because one of its members was thought to be versed in technical forms.

The silence was charged with an all-pervading suspense. Keel was merely a sensitive, transmitting instrument—a

meter, recording the clock-strokes, ominous and slow, the pulse of Fate.

The talking and scraping of boots began again. There was a pushing back of benches and chairs and a general clearing of throats. The men were gathering at the sitting-room door.

As they filed in and circled about him Keel saw that Louise and Mrs. Martin were not present. Why did they remain in the kitchen.

Fortunately, he had not long to ponder this question, for Joseph Stringer stepped before him and spoke in a voice which lacked the characteristic boldness of the old man.

"I'm instructed to read," he began, "the verdict of this court meetin', which is as follows:

"We, the members of the Vigilance Committee, organized to enforce the laws in protection of the people, find Jack Keel, here present, guilty of killing Charles Stringer, known as 'Red.'

"Upon considering all evidence, we find it necessary to acquit Jack Keel. We also find him to be a man of honor, and we unite in pledging him our good will.

"Signed by all members present."

Jack Keel did not feel elated at this unexpected turn of affairs.

In the riot of his emotions he knew not whether to be happy or sad, but he did feel a great unworthiness, especially toward Joseph Stringer; and if he had any definite resolve at the moment, it was to thank the old veteran.

"Mr. Stringer," Keel said, when his opportunity came, "I can't believe that you'd care to touch this right hand; I can't express my thanks otherwise."

There was still a struggling hardness in the withered face, but Stringer an-

swered with a kindness which he bravely tried to feel.

"Let's forget it," he said. "As for your thanks, give them to Louise Summers and to Mrs. Martin. They did it."

Then, to make amends for his lapse into sentiment, he turned to his men and said gruffly: "Any bunch o' gun-packin' rangers that'd let a pair o' skirts ride over 'em rough-shod, has no business bein' out this time o' night. Give the women a chance at Keel now. Hike out!"

The men soon found their hats in such obscure corners as only mountaineers could discover as places of modest concealment, and, with sheepish, congratulatory remarks to Keel, stalked out to their horses, accompanied by Pete Martin.

Then Louise came in.

"Now you won't have to leave these dear old hills!" she exclaimed when she could speak.

"No," he replied. "I guess I'll have to stay here now and prove up on my new reputation. You will help me?"

Her answer was more convincing than speech.

The clock was not alone in filling this period. There was a far-off bustle of departing riders, a friendly laugh or two and "Good nights" exchanged. Through the kitchen door, near which Keel and Louise stood, came the faint clatter of dishes. Also, through this closed door radiated the personality of Mrs. Martin.

"I wonder," whispered Louise, "if you aren't thinking what I am?"

"I was thinking of Mrs. Martin."

"So was I. Shall we tell her?"

He took her hand and then rapped reverently on the kitchen-door.

#### SORROW AND JOY.

Anonymous.

SORROW treads heavily and leaves behind  
A deep impression, e'en when she departs:  
While joy trips by, with steps as light as wind,  
And scarcely leaves a trace upon our hearts.



# A Prize for Princes



## CHAPTER I.

### THE CONVENT.

**R**ICHARD STETTON stopped at the first turn into the main street and gazed down its length, lit by the soft brilliance of the moon.

What he had seen in the last hour made him regret that he had come to Fasilica; he cursed the insatiable and morbid curiosity of youth that had brought him there.

Gutters running with blood; wild-eyed Turks, drunk with victory, striking down men, women, and children and looting their pockets and homes; the pitiful cowardice of the small garrison of soldiers whose duty it was to protect the little town with their lives; all this filled him with a revolting disgust and made him long to flee somewhere, anywhere, away from the sights and sounds of this night of horror.

Suddenly, as he stood wondering which way to turn, surrounded on every side by the terrible din and confusion of the stricken city, he was startled by hearing a new sound that rose above all the others.

It was the ringing of a bell, in wild, irregular strokes that seemed to epit-

omize the cries of suffering and despair which filled the streets from one end of the town to the other.

Stetton looked up; there could be no doubt of it—the sound of the bell came from the air directly above; and there, before his eyes, he saw the form of a belfry in the shape of a cross appearing dimly in the moonlight, at the top of a low, rambling building of dark stone, against which he was at that moment leaning.

The significance of the cross did not escape the young man; his face went white as he murmured: "A convent! God pity them!"

He turned and started to retrace his steps down the little street through which he had reached the center of the town.

As he turned he was jostled roughly by three or four Turks who were rushing past with drawn bayonets, and he again sought the shelter of the wall. Other soldiers came, until a group of thirty or more were gathered on the street in front of the stone building.

"This is the place," they were calling to one another. "How do we get in?"

They were searching along the wall for an entrance to the convent.

From round the corner there came

a great shout of triumph and exultation, from many gruff throats.

"Come, they have found it!" called the soldiers, as they disappeared in the direction whence the cries came.

Stetton, following them round the corner, saw in one glance that the convent and its occupants were doomed. A hundred or more soldiers were banging away with stones and paving-blocks at a little iron gate set between two pillars at the foot of a short flight of steps.

Others were approaching at a run down the street from either direction, having left their victims to a short respite at the scent of this larger and richer prey. The bell above continued to ring in a wild and vain cry to Heaven for assistance.

The gate trembled, hung crazily on one hinge, and fell. For an instant the soldiers hung back, then swept toward the opening in a mad rush.

Stetton saw, just within the door, the figure of a woman, bent and gray-haired, standing in the path of the invaders with uplifted arm. A stone hurled by the foremost soldier struck her in the face, and she sank to the ground, while the soldiers surged through the gateway over her body.

Stetton, feeling himself grow faint, again turned the corner to escape the fearful scene. Then, possessed of a sudden hot anger against these men whom war had turned into wild beasts, he halted and looked round as though for some magic wand or brand from Heaven with which to annihilate them.

His eye, roving about thus in helpless fury, fell on an open window set in the wall of the convent, not three feet above his head. It was protected by iron bars, through which the dim light of a candle escaped to meet that of the moon outside.

Without stopping to consider the reason or rashness of his action, Stetton rushed into the street, picked up a heavy stone and hurled it with all his force at the window. It struck squarely in the center, bending two

of the bars aside for a space of a foot or more.

In another second the young man had leaped up and caught one of the bars, and, pulling his body up and squeezing it through the space left by the stone, found himself within the convent.

He stood in a small room with a low ceiling, entirely bare and unoccupied. At one end was a narrow door! he crossed to it, and, stopping on the threshold, stood transfixed with astonishment.

Before him was a room exactly similar to the other. Two wooden chairs were placed against the wall at the right. A closet stood on the opposite side, and in the center was a wooden table holding some scattered papers, a Bible, and a crucifix. Near the left wall was a *prie-dieu*; and before it, on the bare stone floor, knelt the figures of a young woman and a girl.

It was the sight of the young woman that had halted Stetton and rendered him speechless. At the noise of his entrance she had turned her head to face him without moving from her position, and it was not strange that he was startled by the beauty of her face even in that moment of excitement.

Her hair, magnificently golden, flowed over the folds of her gray dress and covered the ground behind; her eyes, whose deep, blue-gray color could be perceived even in the dim candle light, gazed compellingly straight into the face of the intruder. He remained silent, returning the gaze.

The girl who knelt beside the young woman—a small, slender creature with black hair and olive skin—suddenly sprang to her feet and crossed to the center of the room, while her black eyes snapped viciously at the young man in the doorway.

"Coward!" she said in a low tone of hatred and fear. "Strike! Are you afraid, because we are two to one? Strike!"

"Vivi!"

It was the young woman who called. She had risen to her feet and made a step forward.

"You are not—with them?" she continued, as her eyes again found Stetton's and seemed to take in every detail of his face and clothing. "You are of the town—you will save us?"

The young man found his voice.

"I am an American. I came through the window. I will save you if I can. They have already entered the convent—listen!"

From the corridors without came the sound of tramping feet and shouting voices.

"There is no time to be lost."

The girl and the young woman gazed about in terror, crying: "What shall we do? Save us!"

Stetton tried to collect his wits.

"Is there no way out—no secret passage?"

"None."

"The rear entrance?"

"It can be reached only by the main corridor," replied the young woman.

"The roof?"

"There is no way to reach it."

"But where are the others? Surely you are not alone here? Have they escaped?"

The young woman opened her lips to reply, but the answer came from another quarter. As Stetton spoke, the oaths and ejaculations of the soldiers in the corridors without were redoubled, and a series of frightful screams sounded throughout the convent. The shrieks of distress and despair rose even above the hoarse cries of the soldiers; they came evidently from the room on the other side of the wall. The face of the girl was white as she looked at Stetton and stammered:

"They are in the chapel. They were hiding there. God pity them!"

She approached the young man with trembling knees and an eloquent gesture of appeal; he stood as though paralyzed by the cries from beyond

The cries grew louder. Footsteps and the gruff voices of soldiers were heard approaching down the corridor outside; another moment and they would be discovered.

Feeling a hand on his arm, Stetton turned to find the young woman gazing at him with eyes that held impatience and resolution, but nothing of fear.

"Could we not escape through the window?" Her voice was firm and calm.

"The window?" Stetton repeated stupidly.

Suddenly roused, he turned and ran swiftly into the next room and glanced through the barred window by which he had entered. The street without was deserted.

With a word to the others, who had followed and stood at his side, he squeezed his way through the bars and dropped to the ground below, falling to his knees. He got to his feet in time to catch the girl as she was pushed through the window by her companion. The young woman followed, disdaining any assistance as she came down lightly as a bird, and they stood together in the dimly lighted street.

Knowing that, close as they were to the main thoroughfare, they were apt to be discovered at any moment, Stetton lost no time in discussion of a route.

"Run!" he whispered, pointing down the narrow street by which he had approached the center of the town.

The young woman hesitated.

"But you?"

"I'll follow. Go!"

As they ran the shouts of the drunken soldiers and the cries of their victims assailed their ears from behind, urging them forward. The street which they were following—crooked and narrow, and saved from darkness only by the fading light of the moon—appeared to be completely deserted, and the houses on either side were

closed and shuttered and without lights.

Here and there a head appeared, thrust through a door or window, but at their approach was hastily withdrawn. It was evident that this street had not yet been invaded; their escape seemed a certainty—but where to find a safe retreat? Stetton overtook his companions and spoke as they ran:

“Do you know the town? Do you know any place to go?”

The young woman shook her head.

“No.”

“Then follow this street. We must take to the country. If I could find General Nirzann—I know him—”

This suggestion—a somewhat foolish one under the circumstances—brought no response, and they continued their rapid flight. They had already passed three or four cross streets, and Stetton was beginning to think they were well beyond danger, when, as they reached the next crossing, they were suddenly confronted by a band of Turks who pounced on them from behind a little wooden building on the corner.

At the same moment, glancing to the left, Stetton was dimly aware of a fresh burst of shouts and outcries as the soldiers came rushing into the street from the other end and began a furious assault on the doors and windows of the houses and shops.

As the group of six or seven soldiers stopped directly in the path of the fugitives, they appeared to hesitate momentarily. Stetton heard one of them cry, “Come on, they have nothing! To the stores!”

Then, catching sight of the face of the young woman as she stood clinging to Stetton’s arm, the speaker jerked himself forward and stared at her with a drunken leer.

“Allah! A beauty!” he laughed, and grasped her roughly by the shoulder.

Even as he acted, Stetton cursed himself for his folly. He knew that the little slip of paper in his breast-

pocket, signed by General Nirzann, would permit him to pass unmolested, though it would be useless to protect his companions.

With a rapid glance he counted the group of soldiers—there were seven of them. Against such odds what could he do? He was a man of caution; he thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth the slip of paper.

As he did so the leader of the band jerked the young woman violently forward and caught her in his arms.

It was then that Stetton acted, cursing his own folly. Leaping forward, he struck the soldier a savage blow in the face with his fist.

The soldier staggered back with a cry of surprise and pain, releasing his hold on his intended victim.

“Pig!” he screamed, rushing at Stetton. His comrades sprang to his assistance with upraised bayonets and pistols.

Before they could reach him Stetton had thrust the young woman and the girl to one side, calling to them to run. Then he himself leaped aside, barely missing the point of the foremost bayonet. Dashing off to the right he had joined his companions before the soldiers had time to turn, and was racing down the street at the top of his speed.

The girl who had been called Vivi caught his hand as he came up to them, saying, “Are you hurt?” Stetton shook his head and urged them forward.

The sound of pistol shots came from behind, and bullets whistled past their ears. Then the shouts of the soldiers as they started in wild pursuit, shooting as they ran.

There came a sudden, sharp cry from the young woman:

“Are you hurt?” panted Stetton. “In the arm. It is nothing,” she answered, without slackening her pace.

Glancing behind, Stetton muttered an oath as he saw that the soldiers were gaining on them. The street ran straight ahead as far as he could see

in the moonlight, and he knew that a turn to the right or left would probably land them in the arms of another of the bands of marauding soldiers.

To escape by flight appeared impossible. With a hasty glance toward either side of the narrow street, in search of a possible refuge, he saw, some distance ahead and to the right, a house, through the window of which appeared the feeble light of a candle. It was removed somewhat from the street; reaching it, Stetton dashed suddenly onto the gravel walk in front, pulling his companions after him.

The door was locked; he rattled the knob and pounded frantically on the panels with his fists; the soldiers had turned into the path and were now but a short distance away.

"In Heaven's name, open!" shouted the young man.

His companions had crouched against the door, locked in each other's arms. There was the sound of bolts drawn back, the door flew open, and the fugitives tumbled within.

Stetton heard a man's voice calling to the young woman and the girl to go to the rear of the house, to escape the bullets that were coming through the door. He turned to face the speaker—a giant of a man with a bushy black beard, who was relocking and bolting the door.

"How many are there?" asked the man with the beard, pulling Stetton aside, out of range from the door.

"Seven."

"Turks?"

"Yes."

The man with the beard muttered an oath and ran to a window. Soon he called out:

"They seem to be out of ammunition. The drunken devils! Come here!"

Stetton joined him and looked through the window. The soldiers had halted a dozen paces from the door, and the one who had felt Stetton's fist appeared to be urging the others to make an attack.

Suddenly the man with the beard pulled a revolver from his pocket, thrust it through the glass of the window, and fired into their midst. One of the soldiers fell; the others, without stopping to look after their comrade, took to their heels and disappeared down the moonlit street.

"Cowards!" the man grunted contemptuously, pocketing his revolver. Then he turned to Stetton:

"You had better look after your companions—I'll stay here."

"But how—I don't know where—"

"You must remain for the night.

By morning the officers will get these brutes under control, and you can return home. There are two rooms with beds in the rear. If you need me, you will find me in there," he finished, pointing to a room on the right.

"But, pardon me, are you alone?"

The man with the beard gazed at Stetton with piercing eyes. "Young man, you talk too much. But then—no wonder—it is your confounded English impertinence."

"American," Stetton smiled.

"It is all the same."

"We do not think so."

"Well—leave me." Black eyes flashed above the black beard. "Anyway, all this," he made a circle with his arm to encompass the war-devastated city of Fasilica, "this is all the result of your impudent interference. These mountains were made for us to rest our feet on. And if the Turks did not have your favor to rely upon—if you would leave it to us—"

Stetton had started to leave the room, but turned at the door.

"Us?"

The man with the beard scowled unpleasantly.

"Yes, us. I am a Russian, sir."

The scowl deepened; and Stetton, thinking that this was a strange host indeed, turned without making any reply and went in search of the young woman and the girl. He found them in a room in the rear, crouched on a

bed in the corner. At his entrance they sprang to the floor and advanced to meet him with an eager question:

"The soldiers?"

"They have gone," said Stetton. "You are safe."

His eyes were fastened on the face of the young woman; now that they had leisure for the feast; they could not leave it.

Wondrously beautiful she was, indeed; almost supernaturally so; what with the whiteness of her velvet skin, her glorious golden crown of hair, and the bright glitter of her gray-blue eyes. But even in that moment, when Stetton felt for the first time her compelling fascination, he beheld those gray-blue eyes with something like a shudder as they gazed boldly into his own.

"Our host frightened the soldiers away," he said, recovering himself with an effort. "We are safe for the night—we can sleep here—and by morning the trouble will be over."

"Oh, but you are good to us!" cried Vivi, advancing with outstretched hand.

She was a girl of seventeen or eighteen, while her companion was perhaps five years older. Her modest attractions, though by no means contemptible, were completely eclipsed by the other's bold beauty.

"You are so good to us!" Vivi repeated.

The young woman smiled.

"Indeed, you have earned our gratitude," she said. "If it had not been for you—but it is too horrible to think about. It would be absurd to try to thank you—*monsieur*—"

"My name is Stetton—Richard Stetton."

"And mine is Aline Solini. My little friend is Vivi Janvour—French, as you can see. There is nothing to tell about ourselves; when one has entered a convent the past is dead."

"And the future?" asked Stetton, wondering if he meant anything by the question.

"That, too."

"Still, it seems a shame to bury a flower."

"When it is withered?" Aline Solini smiled.

"I was about to add, when it is yet fresh and beautiful."

"You are bold, M. Stetton."

"Pardon me—I have eyes, and my tongue speaks for them—" Stetton stopped suddenly and cried: "But I forgot! You are wounded and need immediate attention."

Aline shrugged her shoulders.

"It is nothing."

But Stetton insisted, and finally she uncovered her arm for his inspection. The wound was by no means serious—scarcely painful—but the white skin was torn apart for a space of an inch or more, and an ugly red line extended below the elbow. With an exclamation of concern Stetton disappeared, and soon returned with a basin of water and some strips of cloth.

Noting Vivi's smile at his clumsy efforts to bathe and bandage the wound, he allowed her deft fingers to take the place of his awkward ones, watching her in silence from a seat on the edge of the bed.

Now that the danger was past, Stetton was congratulating himself on having met with so interesting an adventure. And, he added complacently in his thoughts, it was apt to become more interesting still. If it did not, it would be no fault of his.

He looked at Aline, wondering how so glorious a creature had persuaded herself to abjure the world and its pleasures; in the usual total ignorance of the American Protestant concerning the Roman Church, he supposed that no one ever entered a convent without taking the veil.

Well, nun or Ninon, she was perfect, he was reflecting, when he was suddenly startled by the sound of her voice:

"You are staring at me, M. Stetton."

"Forgive me," stammered the young man. "I was thinking."

"I admire boldness," said Aline, and



though her tone was playful, her eyes were cold. She turned and spoke to the girl:

"Thank you, Vivi; the bandage is perfect. Do we sleep in this room, *monsieur*?"

"There is another," said Stetton. "Perhaps it is more comfortable. Shall I find it?"

"No; this will do very well. We will leave the other for you."

Stetton shook his head, pointing to the door.

"I shall lie there."

"It is unnecessary."

"But if you will permit me—I should not forgive myself if any harm came to you—"

"Very well." Aline smiled, extending her hand. "Then we will say good night."

Stetton advanced and took the hand in his own. It was white and soft; he could feel the warmth of her blood through the delicate skin. 'There was a pressure of the fingers—or did he imagine it?

Raising his head, he saw her regarding him with a strange smile at once cold and friendly, and her eyes held an invitation that was at the same a challenge. Stetton felt a thrill run throughout his body—he could not have told whether it was pleasure or fear; still looking into her eyes, he lifted her hand and touched it with his lips deliberately.

Then he turned and left the room without paying any attention to Vivi, who had advanced to his side; nor did he reply to the scarcely audible good night that came from her lips.

Half an hour later, having seen the light of the candle disappear from the transom above their door, he approached and knocked lightly and cautiously.

"Well?" came Aline's voice.

"Do you wish anything?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"All right, good night."

Stetton, having wrapped himself in blankets obtained from the adjoining

room, lay down on the floor across the doorway to dream of golden hair and piercing gray-blue eyes.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAN WITH THE BEARD.

ON the following morning the streets of Fasilica bore mute evidence of the havoc wrought by the looting soldiers the night before. Well it was that the commanding officer of the Turkish forces had halted his victorious troops in their career of plunder with sternness and resolution, or the little city would have been leveled to the ground.

Everywhere doors and windows hung in splinters; the streets were strewn with rubbish and articles of clothing or household goods which the soldiers had thrown away in their haste to escape the punishment of their general; great brownish splotches appeared here and there on the pavement, a testimonial to the misfortune or unhappy resistance of some citizen; and in the business section of the town many of the buildings had been destroyed or damaged by fire.

One of these latter was the convent, which had been totally denuded of all its contents. What remained was a mere skeleton of stone, with its empty gloominess accentuated by the rays of the morning sun.

But the sight appeared to strike Richard Stetton as a joyful one rather than a sorrowful. He stood at the corner of the narrow street at the side, exactly opposite the barred window through which he had entered and escaped the night before.

Half an hour previous he had left Aline Solini and Vivi Janvour in the house where they had found refuge from the soldiers, with the object of ascertaining if the convent was in a condition to admit of their return. Obviously, it was not; hence Stetton's smile of satisfaction. His adventure, he was telling himself, was not to end with the excitement of the night.

On his way back to the house he tried to find something to take to his companions for breakfast, but no shops were open; besides, the soldiers had appropriated nearly everything eatable for their own use.

Aline met him at the door of the room in which she and Vivi had slept.

In a few words Stetton told her of the destruction of the convent, and of the impossibility of their finding shelter there. She received the news quite calmly, giving him her hand with a smile and inviting him within the room. Vivi, who had been sitting in a chair by the window, rose as he entered, with a timid nod of greeting.

"The convent is gone," said Aline, turning to her. "We cannot return there."

"Gone!" cried the girl, her face turning pale. "But what—are you sure?"

"I have been there," said Stetton. "It is nothing but an empty ruin."

"Then what are we to do?" faltered Vivi, looking at Aline. "Where can I go? I have no friends, no home—nothing."

"You have me."

Stetton tried, with a sidelong glance, to include Aline in this offer, but felt that the attempt was somehow a failure. She had crossed to the girl and put her arm around her shoulder.

"Don't be alarmed, Vivi," she said. "I shall take care of you."

"And you—have you a home?" asked Stetton.

"I? None." The tone was hard.

"Nor friends?"

"I have never had any."

"Then—if you will permit me—I would be only too happy—"

"Wait a moment." Aline had taken her arm from Vivi's shoulder and crossed half-way to Stetton's side. "You are about to offer us your protection, *monsieur*?"

"I am," Stetton nodded.

"Then before you continue I have something to say. Vivi, leave the room!"

The girl looked up in astonishment, then, as her eyes met those of the speaker, she crossed to the door without a word and disappeared in the hall outside, closing the door behind her. Stetton, left alone with Aline, sat waiting for her to speak.

For a moment the young woman was silent, regarding Stetton with a gaze of speculation, then she said abruptly:

"I thought it best we should be alone."

"But why?" he stammered, frankly puzzled. "What I have to say—"

"I know what you would say, but you think something very different. Let us be frank."

"I have no reason to be otherwise."

"Well, then—what would you say?"

"Merely this, that I place myself at your disposal. You are alone, without friends, with no place to go. I could be of service to you. I will do whatever you say."

"And why?"

"Need I give a reason?" Stetton began to be a little exasperated. "You are a woman, and in trouble. I am a man."

Aline, smiling, came closer to him.

"Do not be angry with me. If I ask questions, it is because my experience has taught me that they are necessary. You are, then, completely disinterested?"

"Yes, I assure you—"

Aline Solini came closer, still smiling. Her eyes looked full into Stetton's, filled, as on the night before, with something that might have been either an invitation or a challenge. There was something in their depths that frightened the young man and made him want to look away from them, but he could not. The woman stood close beside him as she murmured:

"Quite disinterested?"

"No!" Stetton exploded suddenly, and he grasped her hand in his own and held it firmly. "No!"

"Ah! You have spirit, then. I had begun to doubt it. Perhaps, after all— But what do you expect?"

"What you will give," replied Stetton, emboldened by her tone. He still held her hand.

"I do not give," said Aline, still smiling. "I pay—always."

She was quite close to him now; he could almost feel her breath on his face. Her lips were parted in a smile, but the beautiful eyes were cold, and Stetton was conscious of an overmastering desire to see them filled with warm surrender. At the same time, he felt a vague uneasiness; there was something terrifying about that unwavering gaze that seemed to be weighing him in some secret scale.

"You may believe it," he said in answer to her question, while his voice trembled, "for it is so."

He raised her hand to his lips.

She drew away from him and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Well—we can talk of that later, when you have earned the right. I have something to say to you, Mr. Stetton."

There was a pause. Presently she continued:

"When you offer me your protection, *monsieur*, you invite danger. You found me in a convent. I had gone there not to escape the world, but a man. No matter why, he is my enemy—and I am his."

The gray-blue eyes flashed, brilliant and merciless.

"If you help me, he will be yours as well, and he is not one to be despised. For more than a year he has been searching for me, and though I fancied myself securely hidden in the convent, I was wrong. In some way he has traced me to Fasilica; two weeks ago, as I looked through the window of my room, I saw him pass below in the street.

"That is why I am willing to accept your aid; I must leave Fasilica at once. If he finds me he will kill me, unless—"

She stopped, looking at the young man significantly.

"But who is this man?" asked Stetton with dry lips. This was rather more than he had bargained for.

"As for that, I cannot tell you. Is it not enough that I hate him?" Aline eyed him narrowly. "If it is not, that is well, you may leave me."

"But who is he?" repeated Stetton, who, like all men except heroes of romance, detested mystery. Besides, his caution was pulling at his coat-tails. "If he finds us—"

The gray-blue eyes flashed scornfully. "Oh, if I am not worth the trouble—" Then she leaned toward him, softening. "What, *monsieur*? But there, I thought you brave. It was a mistake, then?"

She smiled.

Stetton looked at her and his caution vanished.

"Tell me what to do," he said.

"You will help me?"

"Yes."

"It is dangerous."

"I accept the danger."

"Oh," Aline cried suddenly, springing to her feet, "if you kill him, Stetton, I will love you! But yet—wait—let us understand each other. I must know what you expect."

"My eyes should tell you that."

"They do—but they say too little."

"It is love that is in them."

"That is not enough."

These words had passed rapidly, and Stetton did not understand them—or would not, had it not been for Aline's significant tone and glance. It was the meaning of these that made him hesitate and bring himself up sharply.

At his decision you will wonder; but not more so than he did himself.

To hear Aline Solini's words—their bluntness, their sharp precision—and to hear and see nothing else, was to lose all the charm of her, which lay in her electric glance, her soft velvety tones, her little movements of arms and shoulders, provocative, alluring,

calculated to fire the blood of any man beyond any thought of caution or price.

It was not with words that Cleopatra persuaded Antony to throw away an empire to remain at her side. Words are never the weapon of a beautiful woman, nor should be. Aline Solini understood this—she knew full well the power she held and its source.

Richard Stetton looked at her. Young, vain, impressionable, he met her glance of fire and was lost. It has been said that her meaning was clear to him, and for a moment, creditable to his caution, he hesitated.

But some few things there are which appear to us, even at a first glance, to be so transcendently priceless that whatever the value set upon them they seem to be cheap indeed; and thus it was with Stetton. Besides, he did not take the time to consider consequences—a habit begun in the cradle. He said:

"It is not enough that I love you?"

"Not — No." This with a smile.

"Not—with all it means?"

"That is what I do not know."

Aline raised a hand toward him, then let it fall again. "There can be no double meaning here, *monsieur*. You think I have offered myself to you? Perhaps; but first I must know what you ask."

Stetton looked at her, and thought of nothing but what he saw. He burst forth impetuously:

"I am asking you to marry me, *mademoiselle*."

"Akh!"

This cry, Russian in accent, tender and provocative in tone, was all that was needed to complete the young man's madness. He grasped her hand, standing in front of her, close, and looking into her eyes. Their glances melted into each other like a passionate embrace.

He whispered:

"Say yes—I ask you to marry me—say yes. Anything—anything! Ah! Speak to me!"

"Yes—yes—yes!"

It was a caress and a promise at once, tender and yielding. Sudden tears came to Stetton's eyes as he folded her gently in his arms and held her so for a long time. To look at her was music; to touch her a song of love.

He could not speak; for two minutes he remained silent, feeling himself overwhelmed by a rush of emotion, strange and sweet, but somehow—not satisfying. He moved a little back from her, suddenly demanding:

"When?"

Aline's lips were parted in a little smile at this display of eagerness.

"You must wait," she said.

"Wait?"

"Yes. Have I not said I have an enemy? You have said you love me; you have asked me to marry you; well, we cannot do everything at once. You must realize that I am in danger, that I must first escape—"

"Your fortunes are mine."

Aline flashed a glance at him.

"Thank you for that. Then—we are in danger. But you must make no mistake. I have not said I love you—though—perhaps in time— You have offered me your protection; I have agreed to marry you; that is all—it is a bargain. It must wait; we must first consider our safety."

"Well—" Stetton released her, stepping back a pace—"What are we to do?"

"We must leave Fasilica."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere — stay —" Aline stopped and appeared to reflect—"To Warsaw. Yes, Warsaw. That is best."

"But how are we to get there?" objected Stetton. "The whole country beyond here is nothing but a battlefield—indeed"—the young man interrupted himself, struck by a sudden thought—"it is most likely that you will not be allowed to leave Fasilica."

"Why should they detain us?"

"The policy of the Turk. Any one

who once falls under his authority remains there. But, of course, with the Allies—and yes, by Heaven, that is it! I shall see General Nirzann. He is in command of the Frasers who combined with the Turks in the siege. He will get me passports—I am sure of it."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes—that is, slightly. I came in, you know, with the army."

"Ah! You are a soldier?"

"No."

"A journalist?"

"No. I am merely a curiosity-seeker. I looked for excitement, and I found you. Aline! You will let me call you that?"

"As you please," said the young woman indifferently. "But what of General Nirzann? When will you see him?"

"To-day—now—at once."

"That is well. Vivi and I shall wait here."

Stetton turned quickly.

"Ah, I had forgotten her! Who is she? Is she to go with us?"

"She is an orphan. Her parents were French—Janvour was a minor diplomat, I believe, who died somewhere in the Balkans and left Vivi to be cared for by the Church. I met her in the convent. She loves me; we shall take her with us. And now, go."

"Yes."

Stetton hesitated a moment, then bent over Aline to kiss her. But she held him back, saying, "Not yet, you must wait," in so cold a tone that he drew away from her half in anger.

Then, looking into her wonderful eyes and thinking of the future, so rich in promise, he turned without another word and left the room to go in search of General Nirzann. As he passed Vivi in the hall he heard Aline's voice calling to her to return.

On his way to the street Stetton stopped for a moment in the front of the house to look for the man with the beard, their strange host, but he was not to be found.

Once outside, he turned his steps rapidly toward the center of the town, which was gradually resuming its normal appearance as the citizens, reassured by a proclamation of the Turkish commander, came forth to clear away the debris of the night of pillage.

At the first corner, where he turned, Stetton approached a soldier standing on guard and obtained directions to the headquarters of General Nirzann.

As he walked down the narrow sunlit street, his mind was working rapidly, revolving the incidents of the night's adventure and their probable consequences to himself.

He did not know what to think of Aline Solini. What was the truth about this enemy whom she seemed to fear so greatly? Was she an adventuress? A political refugee? Perhaps, even, a fugitive from justice?

He did not know. What he did know was that he was afraid of her. Those eyes, whose beauty was eclipsed by the cold light of some implacable hatred or secret design, were not the eyes of innocence in distress.

"I would do well to be rid of her," muttered Stetton as he turned into the main street. Nevertheless, he continued to follow the route given by the soldier.

Having looked into Aline Solini's face and felt the quick pressure of her velvety fingers, he was held by them in spite of his native caution that amounted at times to cowardice.

"I would do well to be rid of her," he muttered again. Then he remembered the intoxicating promise of her lips and eyes as she had said: "You must wait."

As for time, he had plenty of it for any adventure. His father—a manufacturer of food products, with a plant in Cincinnati and offices in New York—was wealthy and somewhat of a fool, both of which facts were evidenced by his having furnished the necessary funds for a two years' tour of the world by his unpromising son, Richard.

Richard had been sojourning *à la*

*Soudaine* at Budapest, when, on hearing that the mountains to the east were being invaded by the Turks and Frasers, he had betaken himself thither in search of sensation.

At Marisi he had introduced himself into the camp of the Frasers with letters of introduction from Paris and Vienna, and had followed them through their filibustering campaign till they had joined the Turks in the taking of Fasilica.

Then the entry into the town and the adventure of the night before. He was telling himself that he had found the sensation he sought, and, by dint of dwelling on the face and figure of Aline Solini, he became filled with a resolve that amounted almost to heroism.

He would take her away from Fasilica—away from the mysterious enemy whom she so evidently feared, to Moscow, or Berlin, or perhaps even St. Petersburg.

He went up the steps of a large stone building surrounded by a guard of soldiers for the protection and dignity of the general whose temporary headquarters were within.

In the first room off the hall on the right Stetton found General Nirzann seated before a large wooden table on which were spread maps and papers in apparent confusion. Near a window at the farther end stood a small group of young officers, with swords at their sides, conversing together in low tones.

In the rear of the room a telegraph instrument clicked noisily at intervals. The orderly who had conducted Stetton into the room stood at attention, waiting for the general to look up from his papers.

General Nirzann sat with lowered head, evidently lost in thought. He was a medium-sized man of about forty-two or three years. Beneath his bristling brows a long, thin nose extended in a straight line, and under that, in turn, appeared a dark brown mustache, turned up at the ends after the manner of Berlin.

His dark, rather small eyes, as he raised them to address the orderly, were filled with impatience and irritation. At his nod the orderly turned and left the room.

"What can I do for you?" said the general, looking sharply at Stetton.

The young man approached a step nearer the table.

"I have come to ask a favor, sir."

"A little more and you would have been too late. What is it?"

Stetton, who did not understand the remark, but thought he observed a grin on the face of one of the young officers who had approached, began to tell in as few words as possible of having found the young woman and the girl in the convent, without, however, mentioning the encounter with the soldiers.

The general waited in silence till he had finished; then he said:

"But what do you want of me?"

"Passports, sir, to leave the city."

"Who are these women—residents?"

"No, sir; that is, they were in the convent; one is French, the other, I think, Polish. They wish to go to Warsaw."

For a moment the general was silent, dropping his eyes on the papers before him; then he looked up at Stetton:

"You know, this is none of your affair, *monsieur*. Because you had letters from friends of the prince, you were allowed to accompany us, but only on condition that you would stand on your own responsibility and cause us no trouble. You have annoyed me on several occasions; you are annoying me now. Besides, I do not know that my protection would be of any use; I leave Fasilica to-night. You say you intend to accompany these women to Warsaw. I am sorry for that. I should prefer that you remain here to torment my successor."

"I am sorry, sir—" Stetton began, but the general interrupted him:

"I know, I know; that will do. You shall have your passports. What are their names?"



"Aline Solini and Vivi Janvour," said Stetton.

General Nirzann had picked up a pen and begun to write on a pad of paper, but suddenly threw the pen down and said:

"After all, that will not do. I shall have to see these women and question them. Confound it, Stetton, you are more trouble than a dozen armies! Can you bring them here at once?"

The young man hesitated, thinking rapidly. Aline had said her enemy was in Fasilica; would it not be dangerous for her to appear on the streets in the daytime? But the passports must be obtained; it was necessary to take the risk. Stetton answered:

"Yes, sir; I can bring them."

"Very well, do so." And the general turned again to his papers, indicating that the interview was ended.

On his way out of the building Stetton, meeting a young lieutenant whom he knew, stopped him to ask why General Nirzann was leaving Fasilica.

"You haven't heard?" said the officer, smiling. "The prince has recalled him to Marisi and sent old Norbert in his place. He's in for a picking."

"Well," thought Stetton, "that means that we must get our passports as soon as possible," and he set out down the street at a rapid walk.

He found Aline and Vivi, especially the latter, in a fever of impatience and anxiety. As soon as he told them that it would be necessary for them to go with him to General Nirzann for their passports, this gave way to genuine alarm, in spite of his assurances that no harm would come to them.

"I do not like it," said Aline, frowning. "Besides—you know—it is scarcely safe for me to appear in the streets."

"But what are we to do?" demanded Stetton.

"Are the passports necessary?"

"Positively. Every road out of the city is guarded."

"Then we must make the best of it." The young woman turned to Stet-

ton suddenly: "It is well you returned when you did; Vivi was frightened. Some one has been tramping up and down in the room in front as though he would tear the house down. Where are we? Who was it that let us in last night? I did not see him."

"Russian, he said he was," replied Stetton. "By the way, we must thank him before we leave. I have not seen him this morning. We owe him our lives, perhaps."

They made ready to depart. Vivi was clinging to Aline's arm, evidently completely dazed at her sudden contact with the whirl of life, for she had spent most of her years in the convent. As they passed into the hall and toward the front of the house, she kept muttering a prayer to herself under her breath.

At the end of the hall, Stetton, who was in front, stopped and knocked on a door leading to a room on the left. After a moment's wait a gruff voice sounded:

"Come in."

Stetton looked at Aline. She nodded, and all three of them passed inside.

The man with the beard was seated in a chair by the window, holding in his hand what appeared to be a photograph. As the newcomers entered and he caught sight of the women he rose to his feet and bowed.

"We stopped to give you our thanks and to say good-by," said Stetton. "I assure you, sir—"

"You! *Mon Dieu!*"

The cry came from Aline.

At the same moment that it reached his ears Stetton saw the face of the man with the beard grow livid with violent emotion, and his eyes flashed fire. The next instant, before Stetton had time to move, the man with the beard had leaped past him to the door, which he locked, putting the key in his pocket.

Aline had at first started for the door, but, intercepted in that attempt, had retreated to the other side of the

room, where she stood behind a heavy table at a safe distance; and when the man with the beard turned after locking the door he found himself looking straight into the muzzle of a revolver, held firmly in her small, white hand.

Stetton and Vivi stood speechless with astonishment, unable to speak or move.

"Stand where you are, Vasili." It was Aline's voice, calm and terrible. "If you move I shall shoot!"

"Bah!" said the man with the beard, with supreme contempt. Nevertheless, he stood still. "You may shoot if you like; you will not hit me, and you will not escape me. Fate will see to that.

"It has sent you to me, daughter of hell that you are! I am coming; you know my strength, Marie; I am going to choke the life out of your lying throat with these fingers."

As he moved a step forward he extended his hands in a terrible gesture of menace and hate.

"Look out, Vasili—not a step!"

Disregarding the warning, he leaped forward with incredible agility for his ponderous frame.

As he did so the report of the revolver sounded loud and deafening in the small room, and the man with the beard, halted midway in his leap for vengeance, dropped to the floor with a bullet in his side.

Aline stood motionless, with the smoking barrel leveled at the prostrate form. "See if he is dead, Stetton," she said calmly.

The young man jerked himself forward, crying: "Good Heavens! Aline, what have you done?"

"Fool!" she exclaimed, "does the sound of a pistol frighten you?" Then, moving round the table and looking at the form on the floor: "And so, Vasili, you found me. So much the worse for you."

Suddenly the form moved, and, muttering a dreadful curse, the man tried to rise to his knees, but sank back helpless.

"So? You are not dead?" said Aline in a tone indescribable.

She raised the revolver and pointed it at the head of the wounded man. But Stetton sprang across and, snatching the revolver from her hand, threw it out of the window before she could pull the trigger. Then he shrank back before Aline's furious glance.

"Aline! Aline!" Vivi was crying, "Aline!"

"Silence, Vivi!" The young woman turned to Stetton. "We are ready now to go."

"But he may be dying! We cannot leave him—"

"Let us hope so. But for you I would have finished him. Take us to General Nirzann's."

Stetton, completely subdued by the tone of her voice and the imperious look of her eyes, opened the door, taking the key from the pocket of the man with the beard, not without a shudder, and let them pass out before him.

Aline had her arm around the shoulder of Vivi, whose face was deadly pale.

Stetton followed, after a last hasty glance at the prostrate form on the floor, and a moment later they were making their way down the street toward the headquarters of the general.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MARISI.

OFTEN, unwittingly, the shepherd leads his flock, or a member of it, straight into the jaws of the wolf. Similarly Stetton conducted Aline and Vivi before the gaze of General Paul Nirzann.

If he had been only partially acquainted with the fashionable gossip of Marisi he would have taken them to sleep in the fields in preference.

They found the general in the room where Stetton had had his interview an hour before.

By this time the group of officers

had increased to a dozen or more, and the building was filled with an air of bustle and activity, incident, no doubt, to the transfer of the command which was to take place at noon. Orderlies were hurrying to and fro, and the the telegraph instrument clicked continuously, while the low hum of voices was heard on every side.

An orderly approached the general: "Richard Stetton asks to see you, sir."

The general looked up. "Is he alone?"

"No, sir; two women are with him."

"Show them in."

A minute passed, while General Nirzann busied himself with the inventory of ordnance to be handed over to his successor. Then, hearing an ejaculation of astonishment from the officers near the door, he looked up sharply.

Aline Solini had entered the room, followed by Vivi and Stetton.

The eyes of General Paul Nirzann widened in an involuntary stare as they rested on the face of the young woman, while the officers crowded together near the table with murmurs of admiration, which caused a flush of resentment to mount to Stetton's brow, and Vivi shrank closer to him, trembling.

Aline stood perfectly composed, though her face was slightly pale.

"Are these the women who desire the passports?" asked the general, looking at Stetton.

"Yes, sir."

The general regarded them for a moment in silence, then spoke to Aline:

"What is your name?"

"Solini—Aline Solini."

"And yours?"

But Vivi could not utter a syllable, and Aline answered for her:

"Mlle. Vivi Janvour."

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Warsaw."

"You were residing, I believe, in

the convent. Are you citizens of Fasilica?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you come from?"

Aline hesitated perceptibly before she answered:

"I am from Odessa."

"And Mlle. Janvour?"

"She is from Paris. Her father, now dead, was Pierre Janvour, a French diplomat."

"You say you are from Odessa?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you married?"

"No—that is—I am not."

The eyes of the general narrowed.

"You seem to be in doubt on the question," he observed dryly.

"I beg your pardon, sir"—Aline's eyes flashed with resentment—"I said I am not married."

"Very well, very well," The general was silent for a moment, then he continued: "I think, *mademoiselle*, I should like to question you further—alone. Gentlemen, leave us."

The officers went out in a body, with backward glances at Aline; then the general rang for an orderly and told him to conduct Stetton and Vivi to another room. Stetton opened his mouth to protest, but was stopped by a glance from Aline, which said plainly: "Be easy; I can handle him."

As he waited with Vivi in a room at the further end of the hall, Stetton was consumed with impatience at the delay. He had before his eyes a picture of the man with the beard lying wounded on the floor, and he wanted only one thing now: to get out of Fasilica, and that as soon as possible.

What if he had been only slightly injured—what if he had followed them and was even now entering the headquarters of the general? He went to the door of the room and looked down the hall; no one was to be seen but the guard at the entrance.

"After all, Aline was right; I was a fool to interfere," he muttered.

"I beg your pardon; what did you say?"

It was Vivi's voice; he had forgotten her presence.

"Nothing," he answered, turning. "I was thinking aloud."

Presently the girl spoke again:

"Do you know who that—that man was, M. Stetton?"

"What man?" Stetton affected not to understand.

"The one—we left—back there."

"No." Stetton looked at her. "Do you?"

"No. I know nothing. How could Aline do it? You heard—she would not allow me to speak to her on the way here. She has been so good—I have always loved her so!"

"Did you know her before she came to the convent?" asked Stetton.

"No. I saw her first there. I was not allowed to be with her, and she used to come to my room at night to talk. She was there last night when the soldiers came—and you."

There was something in the last two words that sounded pleasantly in Stetton's ears. He looked at the girl.

"So that was your room?"

"Yes. I have lived there ever since I can remember. It was so pleasant after Aline came, and now—" Vivi shuddered and turned away.

"Now it will be pleasanter still," declared Stetton, "as soon as we get away from Fasilica. You will see. You know nothing of pleasure, child."

He was surprised to hear her cry:

"But I do! And I am not a child!"

"No?" he said, amused. "Pardon me, Mlle. Janvour."

He walked to the door again and looked down the hall. It remained empty.

"What the deuce can they be doing?" he muttered, and took to pacing up and down the room.

Vivi had seated herself in a chair, and her face betrayed an anxiety as keen as his own. For twenty minutes or more they continued to wait thus in silence, and Stetton had about decided to investigate for himself when the orderly appeared at the door to

announce that General Nirzann requested his presence.

Vivi accompanied him. They found the general still seated at the table, while Aline occupied a chair at one end. As they entered, the general rose to his feet and bowed politely, while Aline sent a reassuring smile to Vivi.

"I beg your pardon, *mademoiselle*," said General Nirzann, "for having subjected you to an inconvenience that you perhaps regarded as a discourtesy. Believe me, it was not so intended. Mlle. Solini has explained everything satisfactorily."

Stetton sighed with relief.

"And the passports?"

"They will not be necessary, M. Stetton. Mlle. Solini has changed her mind—the privilege of every woman. She is going to Marisi; and, since I myself leave for that place this afternoon, she has done me the honor to accept the protection of my escort."

Stetton started with anger.

"So that is what—" he began violently, but was interrupted by Aline's voice:

"We shall expect you to accompany us, M. Stetton. Vivi, too, of course."

"But I thought you wanted to go to Warsaw!" the young man protested; then, catching a significant glance from Aline, he checked himself and said: "Of course, as the general says, you have a right to change your mind. And, since I have nothing else to do, I shall be glad to go with you."

This apparently did not please General Nirzann; he frowned at Stetton with evident hostility, saying: "It is not necessary." Whereupon the young man smiled provokingly.

"Nevertheless, as Mlle. Solini invites me, I shall go. And now, sir, we must leave you; the ladies have not breakfasted."

"They can breakfast here," said the general.

"Nor I."

"Well—and you, too."

Stetton hesitated. He wanted to.

refuse, but caution advised otherwise. At this moment, he reflected, the man with the beard, breathing vengeance, might be searching the streets for its object; decidedly they were safer where they were, especially under the protection of the general. He ended by accepting.

Breakfast was served to them in a room on the floor above by General Nirzann's personal steward—fruit and eggs and rich, yellow cream from some neighboring farm.

They ate in silence; once or twice Stetton started to speak, but was halted by a glance from Aline, with a nod at the steward. Then, when they were finished and the dishes had been cleared away, she sent Vivi to the other end of the room and turned to him with a smile.

"You look angry, *monsieur*—and full of words. Now you may talk."

"Have I not reason to be?"

"Angry?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Good Heavens!" Stetton burst out. "Have I not seen you mur—"

"Stop!" Aline's eyes flashed. "You are not happy in your choice of terms. It was in self-defense. He would have killed me."

"Not when he was lying on the floor helpless," retorted Stetton. "I cannot help my choice of terms. You would have murdered him."

"I do not deny it," said Aline calmly. "And I do not regret it. He is not fit to live."

"Who is he?"

"Did I not say I had an enemy?"

"Oh," said Stetton slowly, "it was—the one you told me of?" Aline nodded, and he continued: "But I might have guessed it. Then—of course I cannot know—nor can I blame you."

A smile appeared on Aline's lips, and she stretched out her hand and placed it on his as it lay on the arm of his chair.

"You trust me, do you not?" she

whispered; and Stetton, gazing into her eyes, forgot to look for a meaning in her words.

Presently he said:

"Still, I failed you. You must laugh at me when you remember that I offered you my protection. It was a sorry bargain you made, *mademoiselle*."

"I do not think so," said Aline, with her inscrutable smile. "I know why you say that—because I accepted the protection of General Nirzann. But was it not best? Our bargain still holds; I—I do not wish to forget it"—Stetton seized her hand—"and you may still fulfil your part. Did you not say you are an American?"

Stetton nodded, wondering.

"Then," Aline continued, "perhaps it will soon be necessary that you return to your own country?"

"No," said Stetton.

"I suppose you are rich, like all Americans?"

"I am worth ten millions," said the young man impressively. His caution did not extend to his father's money.

"Francs, of course?"

"No, dollars," said Stetton.

"Well, that is not what I wish to talk of," said Aline, who had found out what she wanted to know. "It is this: I have accepted General Nirzann's escort because he declares that without it we would be unable to get ten miles from Fasilica. The country is devastated, and the railroad runs no farther than Tsevor. We must leave Fasilica, so what could I do?"

"It is best, I suppose," muttered Stetton.

"There was another reason," Aline continued, regarding the young man speculatively, "why I accepted General Nirzann's offer. You will be surprised—so was I. He is my cousin."

Stetton turned quickly.

"Your cousin!"

"Yes, a distant one. He is a cousin of my mother. We discovered it quite by accident, while he was questioning me in your absence. I had

never seen him before, but he established the fact."

Aline smiled.

"So you see I have a relative, after all."

Stetton looked at her curiously. The truth was, he doubted her, and he was searching for a corroboration of his doubt in her face.

She met his gaze unfalteringly. He ended by believing, and made some remark concerning the strangeness of the coincidence by which she had found this unknown relative.

"Yes," said Aline composedly, "it had been so long since I had heard of him that I had forgotten his very existence.

"But," she added, "notwithstanding the fact that he is my cousin, I do not trust him. He said—it is not necessary to repeat his words, but I want you near me till we arrive safely at Marisi. You see, I trust you."

Stetton, who had not completely lost his reason, tried to tell himself that the timidity of this speech fitted ill with the resolute and terrible action of Aline Solini but two hours before; but what could he do?

Her eyes were now gazing into his with an expression at once tender and appealing, and her hand again sought his and pressed it gently.

"Then it is settled," she said, crossing to the window and looking down into the street. "We leave with General Nirzann this afternoon. Vivi! Come here, child. We must make up a list of things we will need for the journey."

Stetton started up from his chair, exclaiming: "I was a fool not to have thought of that! Of course, you will need—here is my purse. Take what you want."

"Thank you, General Nirzann has already come to our rescue," said Aline. "An orderly is coming at noon for my list."

"And you accepted!" Stetton exclaimed angrily.

"Why not? It was kind of him."

The two women began to write down the names of the articles they desired, and Stetton turned away. A vague sense of uneasiness and danger was within him; he did not know why exactly, but he began to ask himself questions.

This Aline Solini, who and what was she? Why did he feel, as though it were a natural law of his being, that he must follow her and await her pleasure? Young as he was, and cautious, he had not been without affairs of love, but he had always congratulated himself that no woman had ever made a fool of him. And, he had added, never would.

It was evident to him that General Nirzann, too, had been fascinated by her. This increased his uneasiness. Clearly, he would be a fool to have anything more to do with her; he saw before him the form of the man with the beard lying on the floor, with the revolver pointed at his head, and he shuddered.

Then he thought of what she had just said—of her abrupt question concerning his fortune. "She is a schemer, an adventuress," he thought, "and she is too much for me. I will not go to Marisi."

But, looking at Aline, and meeting her eyes, he felt his resolution waver within him. He crossed the room to her side and began to discuss arrangements for the journey.

Three o'clock that afternoon found them ready to depart. They were to travel on horseback to Tsevor, thirty miles away, where they would take train for Marisi. A hundred troopers were to conduct them; a precaution rendered necessary by the wildness of the country and the hostility of its inhabitants to those who had allied themselves with the Turks.

Aline and Vivi, attired in coarse black suits, the best costume obtainable in Fasilica, were mounted on ponies from the mountains—raw, hungry-looking animals, while Stetton had been given an old black troop-



horse. General Nirzann rode a magnificent white Arabian.

The formalities were few: a salute from some five hundred soldiers drawn up at attention, and they were off down the main street of Fasilica. As they passed the convent, Stetton saw tears in Vivi's eyes as she gave a last, long look at the ruins of what had sheltered her for so many years.

Aline's face was set straight ahead, without so much as a farewell glance.

Half of the escort of troopers rode ahead as a vanguard, while the remainder brought up the rear, riding in fours. This until they reached the mountains; then they were forced to ride in single file by the narrowness of the trail, which at times hung to the side of a steep precipice, hardly more than a shelf.

Two hours it took them to pass the range, and then they found themselves again in a level, winding valley—the valley of the Schino River, which has so often been the scene of bloody conflicts in that war-infested region.

It was a little past seven o'clock when they clattered on to the pavement of the main street of Tsevor. Vivi, who rode at Stetton's side, was greatly fatigued by the unusual and violent exercise, and was barely able to keep her seat in the saddle.

Stetton himself was angry and in ill humor, for General Nirzann had monopolized Aline's company throughout the journey. As he alighted at the railroad station and helped Vivi to dismount, he tried to persuade himself once more to end the matter by returning with the troopers to Fasilica; but he heard the general's little speech of farewell and saw the men turn and ride off, without hinting at any such intention.

A courier had been sent ahead in the morning to arrange for a private car, and they found everything in readiness. They entered it at once and in haste, for a good-sized crowd had collected on the platform at their arrival, and were amusing themselves

by hurling insults and epithets at the head of General Nirzann, who took his seat in his compartment with a scowl, muttering something about "revenge on the scurvy rascals."

Aline and Vivi had a compartment together toward the front of the car; Stetton's was in the rear. A few minutes after they had arrived the train pulled out.

Stetton sank back in the seat of his compartment with a feeling of utter dejection and depression. Something indefinable seemed to weigh upon his heart with a suffocating pressure; something seemed to be saying to him, "Do not go to Marisi."

He tried to shake this feeling off, but it would not leave. He raised the window and allowed the cool night air to rush in against his face, but the desolate blackness without seemed to bring with it a voice that said: "Do not go to Marisi."

He closed the window with a bang, muttering: "This is ridiculous. Am I a weak fool, to allow myself to be afraid of nothing? One might think that Marisi was the home of the devil himself. If it gets too hot for me I can get to Berlin in eighteen hours."

He composed himself with an effort and began to doze, and finally fell sound asleep.

Six hours later he was awakened by some one opening the door of his compartment. It was Vivi. She watched him with a little smile on her face as he opened his eyes.

"What is it—what is it?" asked Stetton, rubbing his eyes.

Vivi replied:

"Aline sent me to wake you. She is the only one who did not sleep. We have reached Marisi."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE WHEEL STARTS SLOWLY.

It was late in the morning of the following day when Stetton awoke after four hours' sleep in a luxurious

room of the Hotel Walderin, Marisi, and, rising, walked to an open window which looked out on an open court of the hotel.

All his depression of the night before was gone; he felt buoyant, confident, and he was humming a lively popular tune as he thrust his head into a basin of cold water with a little shiver of pleasure.

At Fasilica and Tsevor he had felt more or less out of the world, away from the safeguards and conventions of civilization; now he was in a fashionable hotel in Walderin Place, as much a part of European life as Hyde Park or the Bois de Boulogne.

This fact drove away his nonsensical fears; he laughed aloud at them. And he was reflecting, on the floor immediately above was sleeping a young and beautiful woman, as his guest.

He laughed aloud again, in great good humor with himself and the world, and began to dress. What a divine creature! Was she not worth any price? He asked himself this question with an air of bravado to frighten away what doubt remained.

Marry her? Gad! Who would not? Such an opportunity comes only by miraculous luck. This was his thought.

An hour later he presented himself before Aline and Vivi in the drawing-room of their apartment.

"We breakfasted here," said Aline in answer to his question. "How could we go down-stairs? We have no clothes."

"I forgot—of course," said Stetton, a little embarrassed. Then he added with a touch of malice: "But what of the general's list?"

Aline laughed at his tone, then said with a smile:

"You are wrong to be angry with me; we needed his help, and it was necessary to humor him."

"Well, as for the clothes—I shall send some one from Morel's. Will that do?"

"That will do excellently."

"And you, *mademoiselle*, is there anything else you require?"

"Nothing," said Vivi quietly.

She was standing by Aline's chair, with her large, dark eyes passing from one to the other as they spoke.

There was an air of watchfulness about her; Stetton had noticed it before, but it appeared to be the result merely of childish and innocent curiosity.

He wished that she would leave the room; he felt constrained in her presence, and there were several questions he wanted to ask Aline. He lingered a while longer, making observations on nothing in particular, then left to perform the errand at Morel's, saying that he would return in the afternoon. As he went out he laid a bank-note on a small pedestal near the door.

As soon as the door had closed behind him Aline crossed the room with quick steps and picked up the bank-note. It was for five thousand francs. Smiling, she placed it in her dress.

"What is that?" asked Vivi curiously.

Aline told her. She looked puzzled.

"But why should he give us so much money? What can we do with it?"

"You little goose," said Aline, and there was genuine affection in her tone; "you are no longer in a convent. Wait; you will see. Luck is with me now; it is all I needed. Ah, Vasil—" her eyes became cold and her tone hardened—"you taught me—others will pay for you."

"All the same, we should not take that money," said the girl stubbornly.

"Listen, Vivi." Aline looked at her speculatively, as though trying to decide what to say. Then she continued: "You know I love you."

"I know," said Vivi, taking her hand.

"You know I would do only what I think best. I am wiser than you."

"I know," Vivi repeated.

"And you do not think I did wrong when—last night."

"No, I no longer think you did wrong; but it was horrible."

"Well, you must trust me." Aline patted the girl's hand gently. "You must not ask me to explain things. As for M. Stetton's money—I will tell you about that. But it is a great secret. You must not mention it."

"How could I? I know no one."

"You know General Nirzann; and you must not speak of it to M. Stetton. He does not wish it to be known. I accept his money because I am going to marry him."

Vivi hastily drew her hand away and looked up with startled eyes.

"You are going to marry him?" she said slowly.

Aline answered: "Yes. Does it surprise you? What is the matter, child?"

Vivi's face had grown pale and she seemed to be trembling. But she soon controlled her emotion and said:

"I am so glad, Aline. Do you love him?"

"Yes," replied the woman with her peculiar, inscrutable smile. "But, remember, you must say nothing of what I told you."

"No; I promise," said Vivi. Her face was still pale and she seemed to be forcing her voice to be calm.

At that moment a servant appeared to announce that a messenger from Morel's asked to see Mlle. Solini. He was admitted at once, and they were soon busily examining samples of dresses, suits, cloaks, and lingerie.

Vivi held back at first, but it was not long before she had entered the performance with as great delight as Aline herself.

In the mean time Stetton, having called at Morel's and performed two or three errands on his own account, was walking along the sunny side of the fashionable drive which stretches away to the north from Walderin Place.

On this side was the park, on the other a long line of sumptuous dwellings, the most important of which was the white marble palace of the Prince of Marisi. It was too early for any one to be seen; the Drive was practically deserted.

"Hang it all," Stetton was saying to himself as he walked along, "that little Vivi is not at all bad-looking, but she is in the way. Something must be done with her. I wonder if Naumann is in town."

On his way back to the hotel he stopped at the German legation and asked for Frederick Naumann. He was told that his friend would not be in till late in the afternoon, and he resumed his walk along the Drive, now impatient for the time when he should see Aline again.

A little after one o'clock found him in her apartment.

She and Vivi were both quite transformed by their purchases of the morning—so much so that Stetton felt a thrill of joy and pride run through him as he advanced to take the hand of this wondrously beautiful woman who had accepted his protection and his money.

He wanted every one to see her; he wanted to tell people that she belonged to him. Above all, he wanted her; though always he felt a curious sense of uneasiness in her presence.

Instinct was trying to do for him what reason would have done for a wiser man, who, looking at Aline Solini, would have said: "She is that most dangerous thing in the world—a woman with the face of an angel and the heart of a demon. Beware!"

Stetton approached her, saying:

"Now, indeed, you are irresistible."

"The least I could do was my best for you," replied Aline.

"And Vivi, too!" said Stetton. "*Mademoiselle*, allow me to say that you are charming."

The girl bowed without replying as she retreated to a seat at the farther end of the room.

Stetton cast a meaning glance at her, saying to Aline:

"I want to talk with you."

She smiled, reading him with her eyes.

"Yes," she agreed; "it is necessary that we come to an understanding."

She sent Vivi away on some pretext or other and again turned to Stetton:

"Well, *monsieur*?"

But, despite his firm resolution of the morning, the young man could find nothing to say, now that he found himself alone with her. He hesitated, seeming to search for words, and finally ended by stammering out:

"You know—you know—"

Aline laughed outright:

"You are an awkward lover, Stetton!"

This brought Stetton to a standstill and left him without anything to say. He burst out brutally:

"Well, you promised to marry me, and I can't wait. You promised me."

Aline said coolly:

"If you can't wait, really I am sorry. I see that you have greatly misjudged me. I will not detain you longer. Good-by, *monsieur*."

"What do you mean?" cried Stetton, frightened at the thought of losing her.

"You are too impatient. You approach me like a savage with a club; you have no tact, no finesse; in a word, I am disappointed in you, and we had best part while we are friends."

"But that is impossible!"

"Impossible?"

"Yes, it is indeed!" The young man's anxiety made him eloquent—that, and her exquisite face so close to his own. "Good Heavens, I love you! How can I leave you? I see plainly I have made a mistake, but you will forgive me—you must forgive me. I will be patient—I swear it! Tell me you will not send me away!"

"You love me, then?"

"You know it! Devotedly!"

Aline smiled and he seized her hand.

"I may stay?" he cried.

"I don't know," said Aline, assuming a tone of doubt, for she was now sure of him. "I did not wish to forget our bargain—you may believe that, Stetton. But I must have my own time."

"You will see—I shall be patient."

"Then—"

Aline extended her hand, and he pressed it to his lips, kissing the fingers and palm over and over.

She continued slowly, as though picking her words: "It is only fair you should know why I desire a delay. I mean the particular reason—it is Vivi."

"Vivi?"

"Yes. I love her, and I feel that I am responsible for her welfare, which means, in the case of a young girl like her, her marriage. I will never have another opportunity like the present.

"General Nirzann"—Stetton started slightly at the name—"has promised to introduce me into the best circles of Marisi, and it will be strange if I cannot find a match for her. Then I shall be ready to leave Marisi—with you, if you still desire it."

"But General Nirzann—why should he do this?" demanded Stetton in astonishment.

"I have made a friend of him. Besides, is he not my cousin? Be easy; you have no reason to be jealous; he is an old fool. I can manage him."

"I don't like it," Stetton muttered.

Aline laughed.

"Surely you have not so poor an opinion of yourself as to fear an old fossil like the general? You should know better—if I did not prefer you to any other—but there, I shall confess too much."

She glanced into his eyes and then quickly away, as though afraid of betraying her thoughts.

"Confess!" cried Stetton. "Ah, tell me!"

"What can I say?" She pretended to hesitate, and actually succeeded in bringing a pink flush to her face.

"Tell me you love me!"

"Well, then—I do—a little."

Stetton clasped her in his arms. She submitted to the embrace for a moment, then drew herself away.

"But there—you know you must be patient."

"I cannot promise that," said Stetton, breathing quickly. "But I shall not annoy you. You are worth waiting for a lifetime; you will see if I mean what I say. In the mean time I must see you every day—you cannot deny me that—and I can help you."

"Yes, you can help, now that you are sensible," said Aline with a tender and provoking smile.

"No other pleasure is worth a thought," said Stetton, completely bewitched. "Tell me, what can I do?"

Aline had been waiting for that question. She glanced at him narrowly through her eyelashes, saying:

"There are so many things I don't know where to begin. Of course, it is all a matter of money."

"Of course," Stetton agreed, kissing her fingers.

"In the first place," Aline continued, "if my plans for Vivi are to be successful, we cannot live in a hotel, even the Walderin. We must have a house on the Drive, with a carriage and servants."

Stetton looked up quickly, frowning. He had not thought of beginning on such a scale. The rent alone would amount to fifty thousand francs. "But I don't see why—" he began.

"Luckily, that difficulty is settled," Aline interrupted quickly, noting his frown. "General Nirzann has offered me the use of his house, since he expects to occupy rooms in Marisi Palace for some time. He is a bachelor, you know. It is very good of him."

The fact was, General Nirzann was so far from being the owner of a house on the Drive that he was a pauper, but Stetton did not know that. What he thought was that under no circumstances should Aline live in a house belonging to the general. He said sarcastically:

"Yes, I have no doubt it was a very kind offer. But you must not accept it."

"I have already done so," said Aline.

"Then you must reconsider and decline."

"Stetton, you are positively childish. Besides, I must have the house."

There was a slight pause before the young man said:

"Then I will rent one."

Aline lowered her eyes, that he might not see the light of triumph in them, saying:

"It will be expensive."

"I can afford it," replied Stetton.

"It must be furnished."

"Of course."

"And we shall need a carriage and servants."

"Certainly."

"Then it is settled?"

For reply, Stetton kissed her hand. They talked a while longer, discussing the details of this new arrangement; then the young man made ready to go. At the door he turned, saying:

"By the way, I have a friend or two in Marisi; you will allow me to introduce them to you?"

Then, as Aline answered in the affirmative, he went away to his room on the floor below. There he sat down to write a letter to his father in New York, containing a request for a fifty-thousand-dollar draft.

An hour later, as Aline sat revolving her plans in her mind, with a smile that meant danger for any one who got in the way of them, a servant entered with the card of General Paul Nirzann. Aline took the card, while the smile became deeper. Then she said:

"Show him up."

In a few moments the general entered. Though he held himself erect as he walked across the room to bend over Aline's hand, his bearing was more that of a beau than a soldier. His gait was mincing and he wore a smirk on his face.

After greeting him, Aline said:

"Have you made your peace with the prince?"

"Perfectly," replied General Nirzann with a wave of the hand. "The prince read me a lecture on the brutalities of the campaign, and then opened his arms to me. It is impossible to avoid cruelty when you are allied with the Turks, and I told him so. You may believe he did not like it, but I crammed the truth down his throat."

Aline smiled at the idea of this popinjay cramming anything down another man's throat. She said:

"Why didn't he return you to the command?"

"He preferred to keep me in Marisi," replied the general. "The fact is, he can hardly do without me. When I am not at the palace everything goes wrong. He admits it."

"I see."

"And besides," he continued, "I preferred to stay. He was a little surprised at that, but he has never seen you, *mademoiselle*. He does not know the attraction that Marisi holds for me."

"But he will," thought Aline to herself. She said aloud: "It is good of you to say so, my dear general."

"Tut!" said the general. "There is no sense in that. Nor is there any goodness in me. Ask the ladies of Marisi—they could tell things that would astonish you. You know very well I love you, *mademoiselle*."

"Yes; you have told me so," said Aline, trying not to appear impatient.

This was the general's side of the question, and she wanted to talk on her own. After a short pause she added:

"I suppose you did not mention my name to the prince?"

"Good Heavens, no!"

"I presume that will come later?"

"Much later," said the general emphatically. "We must proceed with caution."

"It is just as well. It will take a week or so, at least, to obtain a house

and make the necessary preparations. After that—"

"Have you hooked the American?" the general interrupted.

Aline shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course. And paid him with promises. He is at this moment searching for a house."

The general cackled with amusement.

"The young fool!" he snorted gleefully. "He doesn't know women, that's sure. The way with them is, pay first and maybe afterward. Eh, *mademoiselle*?"

"It is evident that you do know women," said Aline.

She was wondering to herself when the old fool would stop his chatter and allow her to gain some information. After a short pause she said abruptly:

"And now, what of our conspiracy?"

The general looked puzzled as he repeated: "Our conspiracy?"

"Yes. When is my first dinner-party?"

"To-morrow, if you wish." The general bowed gallantly. "You may count on me."

"Thank you," said Aline with a touch of irritation. "But you know very well what I mean."

"Yes, I know what you mean. But are you not pushing things a little, *mademoiselle*?"

"Why delay?"

"Because it is necessary."

"I do not understand that. The season has begun; the sooner we take advantage of it the better."

The general looked at her with something between a simper and a frown; then he said:

"You seem to forget something."

"What is that?"

"My happiness."

"But, my dear general, that is absurd."

The general sighed. "*Chere amie*," he said, "will you come to dinner with me this evening?"



"I have no clothes."

"That is true. Then I suppose I must wait."

Aline whispered:

"Wait until I am mistress in my own house, and you will see, my brave soldier."

"Divine creature!" the general reiterated, trying to give himself the appearance of one dying for love.

"Still, you try to bargain with me," said Aline.

"Who would not bargain where possible to gain heaven?" exclaimed the general.

"Really, you are in danger of making me think you love me."

"Do I not?"

Aline smiled. "Perhaps."

"But it is certain!" cried General Nirzann fiercely. "You think I bargain with you—well, that is because I love you. Do not think I have been idle in your behalf. As I was coming to the hotel I met Mme. Chébe on the Drive, and I spoke to her of you. You will probably receive her card within the first week at your house, and she is one of the six most important women in Marisi."

"My dear general," cried Aline.

The general was unable to meet her flashing eyes.

"You intoxicate me!" he murmured, half dazzled.

And when, five minutes later, General Paul Nirzann left the Hotel Walderin he was hardly able to walk straight for the dizzy exaltation in his brain.

As for Aline, she remained in the chair where the general had left her, with her chin resting on the palm of her hand. Her eyes were narrowed in deep speculation and a peculiar smile appeared on her lips.

But her thoughts were not of Richard Stetton, who at that moment had just finished the last paragraph of a six-page letter to New York, nor of General Nirzann, who was strolling along with an erect figure and a satisfied smile.

No; they had traveled down the fashionable drive to the white marble palace of the Prince of Marisi.

## CHAPTER V.

### NAUMANN TELLS A TALE.

THE following morning found Stetton running from one end of Marisi to the other in search of a house suitable as a setting for his jewel. So he phrased it to himself.

Owing to the fact that the fashionable season had begun two weeks before, he found his task by no means an easy one. All day he searched and the better part of the day following; then quite by chance he ran across an old rugged stone structure at one end of the town, in the worst possible repair and filled with musty furniture. He hastened to the hotel to report to Aline.

"But that will not do at all," said she when he told her where the house was. "It would be much better to stay here. We must positively be on the Drive."

Stetton declared that to be impossible, saying that a house on the Drive could not be procured for love or money.

"Nevertheless, we must have it," was her calm reply.

"But I tell you we can't get it!" cried Stetton with pardonable irritation, as he thought of his weary two days' search.

"Then," said Aline, "it will be necessary to accept General Nirzann's offer. It would have been better to do that in the first place."

But Stetton would not hear of it.

"He is too much in evidence already," he muttered angrily, pacing the length of the room. "I don't like it."

"Nevertheless," Aline insisted, "we must have the house."

"Very well," said Stetton, stopping in front of her, "then we'll get it. Give me one more day. If there's no

other way, I'll rent the blooming palace itself. I understand the prince is hard up for cash."

"Now, I admire you!" cried Aline. "I could never love a man without spirit."

She allowed him to kiss her hand.

The following morning he set out again. He would have enlisted the services of his friend Frederick Naumann, of the German legation, but for the fact that he had been told the day before that Naumann was spending a week in Berlin. He had inquired at every possible source, and now took to wandering about more or less at random. By noon he had found nothing, and began to fear that he must perforce allow Aline to accept the hospitality of General Nirzann.

Early in the afternoon, at the Hotel Humbert, he was told by some one that there was a possibility of obtaining for the season the house of M. Henri Duroy, at 341 the Drive.

Stetton hastened to the address as fast as a six-cylinder motor-car could take him. He was shown in to M. Duroy himself. Yes, M. Duroy would let his house—he had been called to Paris by the sudden death of his brother. Of course, M. Stetton could furnish the proper references? Very good. The rent would be seventy-five thousand francs.

Stetton made a rapid calculation.

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" he muttered to himself—he was able to think only in dollars. "Good Heavens! It's robbery!"

But he paid it—to keep Aline from accepting an offer that had never been made to live in a house that did not exist.

Four days later—for they had to wait for M. Duroy to depart for Paris—Stetton took Aline and Vivi to inspect their new home.

It was a three-story structure of blue granite, somewhat imposing, and in the very best locality. On the ground floor were a reception-hall, drawing-room, library, and dining-

room; the floors above held the sleeping apartments and servants' quarters.

Aline was frankly delighted, sending Stetton eloquent looks and words of gratitude that drove all thought of the seventy-five thousand francs from his mind.

"These rooms," he observed—they were in the chambers on the second floor—"are exactly the thing for you and Vivi. I shall take the one in the rear. It is not large, but that is of no importance."

Aline looked at him in genuine astonishment.

"But that is impossible!" she cried. "Surely you did not imagine you are to live here with us!"

It was Stetton's turn to be astonished.

"Not live with you!" he exclaimed. "Where, then, should I live?"

"I suppose at the hotel."

They began to argue the matter; Stetton with a bluntness that caused Aline to send Vivi from the room. He was stubborn; Aline was persistent; finally she declared she would abandon everything.

"Very well," said Stetton sulkily. "There is no good arguing the matter. I shall live at the hotel."

Frowning, he moved to a window, gazing out on the Drive with his back turned.

Aline crossed to him, smiling.

"You must not be angry with me," she said in a low voice softly.

Then she placed her arms around his neck and kissed him on the back of the head.

Turning, Stetton clasped her roughly in his arms and held her close.

"Would you care?" he demanded.

Aline whispered: "You know I would."

"Do you know something?" said Stetton between his teeth. "It makes me crazy just to look at you—and to feel you—like this—"

"I know—ah, do I not?" Aline drew herself gently away. "But there—I shall confess too much."

"Confess!" cried Stetton. "Tell me you love me!"

There was a noise from behind; Vivi was returning.

"Well, then—I do—a little," Aline whispered. Then, moving away, she went with Vivi to explore the room above.

"Vivi—always Vivi!" Stetton muttered.

Three days later found Aline and Vivi in possession of the house of M. Duroy. Stetton had kept his room at the Hotel Walderin. As for the expenses of the household on the Drive, he had settled that question in what he would have called a businesslike manner.

"I have arranged for a limousine and an open carriage," he told Aline, "and will pay the chauffeur and coachman myself. The other servants will be six hundred francs a month. The table fifteen hundred francs—for you will want good dinners; dress, a thousand; and incidentals, a thousand more. The first of each month I will give you five thousand francs; that will more than cover everything."

Aline thanked him with a kiss; but when he had gone she laughed scornfully. Then she said: "But I suppose I am wrong to blame him; it is the American way, but how detestable!"

She was alone in the library—a tasteful, quiet room, with its low, ebony cases, rich, dark carpets, and paintings of the eighteenth century.

"At last," she said to herself, "I have room; I can breathe—and act."

She moved to the dining-room and stood gazing from the doorway with the eye of a general contemplating a field of battle. A smile of anticipatory triumph was on her lips as she walked to the reception-hall and began to mount the stairs to the rooms above.

She had not followed Stetton's suggestion concerning the arrangement of the sleeping chambers. With the exception of the little room in the

rear, shut off from the others, which had been given to Vivi, she had taken the entire second floor for herself. A little manipulation of furniture and the result was a bedroom, a dressing-room, and a reception-boudoir. But Vivi had declared herself perfectly satisfied, saying that she had lived so long in the convent that even her one little room appeared frightfully large to her.

Late in the afternoon of the second day at their new home Aline and Vivi went for a drive in the open carriage. Never was toilet more carefully planned and executed than that of Mlle. Solini on this occasion, though she really had little need of it.

Her appearance on the Drive created a sensation that bade fair to become a triumph. Every one was staring at her; every one asked: "Who is she?" Vivi could not have served better as a foil if she had been selected for the purpose.

But the one carriage that Aline was looking for—the carriage of the Prince of Marisi—did not appear; and she ordered the coachman to drive home long before the line had begun to thin.

They had met Stetton, driving alone in his motor-car, and General Nirzann, who was seated by the side of a large, haughty-looking woman with enormous earrings and a wart on her nose.

Aline had returned the general's salutation with the merest inclination of her head; at Stetton's bow she had smiled pleasantly.

That evening General Nirzann called. When the servant entered with his card Aline turned to Vivi and said:

"Remember, Vivi, do not leave the room."

So the general was unable to make much progress in his own interests, and was forced to discuss the plans for Aline's assault on the society of Marisi. She got little satisfaction out of that; the general was cautious, and whenever she asked a leading question

he would reply with a knowing smile that seemed to say: "*Softly, made-moiselle, softly.*"

Aline said to herself after he had gone:

"Really, that little general is more astute than foolish. Is it possible that he is going to force my hand? Well, if I must, I must; but he shall pay dearly for it after." And her eyes flashed ominously.

In the mean time Stetton, not to be outdone in the business of intrigue, had concocted a little scheme of his own, though an inglorious one. He believed that it was the presence of Vivi that stood in the way of the fulfilment of his desires. His plan led to the removal of this difficulty.

Within an hour after Frederick Naumann's return to Marisi he received a call from Richard Stetton.

Naumann was a young and aspiring diplomat who counted on winning position with his wealth and talents. Stetton had met him a year before in Berlin, and had renewed the acquaintance during his short stay in Marisi previous to the departure of the army.

"But what are you doing here?" asked Naumann, after greetings had been exchanged. "Did the dogs of war bite you?"

"Not exactly," Stetton replied with a laugh. "The fact is, I have found the most beautiful woman in Europe."

"Indeed?" said the other skeptically. "But there is nothing wonderful about that—there are thousands of her. May I ask, has the lady found you?"

"Yes—and no. She is living in a house I have rented—the house of M. Duroy, at 341 the Drive. I have taken it for the season—perhaps longer."

Naumann whistled. "Lucky dog! But is she as beautiful as you say?"

"Ask any one in Marisi. The entire promenade stopped yesterday in confusion when she appeared. And I—well, the fact is, I am going to marry her."

"No."

"Yes. When you see her you will not blame me. She is wonderful. Nothing short of it. But it is to remain a secret for the present—our engagement, I mean. No one is to know of it. I count on your discretion."

"You may."

"And, besides that, I count on your help. She has a girl with her—a pretty little thing, about eighteen. Her name is Vivi Janvour. Aline has what she calls plans for Vivi's welfare, and I am supposed to linger in hope till they are accomplished."

Naumann smiled. "But why?"

"On account of General Nirzann. You know him, I believe. He is her cousin; at least, so she says. He is to stand sponsor for her in Marisi, and she is afraid that if he knows of her engagement to me he will decline the office. Besides, she talks some silly rot about not wanting Vivi along on the honeymoon, and that sort of thing. In short, she wants me to wait, and I don't feel like it."

"But what can I do?"

There was a pause while Stetton seemed to be searching for words. Finally he said:

"Well—the fact is—this little Vivi is not bad-looking."

"Ho!" Naumann's eyebrows lifted.

"And you, I believe, are not blind to the charms of the fair. What might come of it I do not pretend to say. Talk to her, drive with her, amuse her; at any rate, I want you to meet her; then we shall see."

"What kind of a girl is she?"

"The quiet, timid sort—lived all her life in a convent. But she is really pretty."

"My dear fellow, I really believe you expect me to marry this creature."

"By no means. I expect nothing. But, at any rate, you can see her—introduce your friends to her, start the ball a rolling—I would consider it a great favor."

"I'll see her, of course," replied Naumann.

"That's all I ask of you—now. Dine with me to-night at the Walderin and we'll talk it over."

So much for Stetton's plan, crude and simple indeed, but nevertheless with a fair chance of success. Naumann was a good-looking young fellow, polished and graceful, with an air of cynicism that had made him a great favorite with young ladies under twenty.

The following morning Stetton called at No. 341. Aline received him graciously; she knew that his love must have something to feed on, even if it were only crumbs. Besides, she had an additional favor to obtain from him.

"I have a friend I would like to introduce," said Stetton. "Naumann—Frederick Naumann—secretary of the German legation. He knows every one in Marisi—that is, every one who counts—and he might be of some use to you."

"Bring him to see me," said Aline.

"To-morrow?"

"Certainly."

They chatted for an hour or so, and Stetton stayed to lunch.

"This is delightful," he said, sitting down with Aline and Vivi; and he felt a thrill of pride and satisfied vanity as he thought that this was his house, these his servants, and that this beautiful woman had promised herself to him.

His was one of those natures that live as much on appearances as on realities. He was so filled with a sense of his royal power and generosity that Aline talked him out of another twenty thousand francs with comparative ease, pleading the poverty of her wardrobe.

On the following day, accordingly, Stetton conducted his friend Naumann to the house on the Drive.

Naumann went with a certain reluctance; but Stetton had befriended him—no matter how—on a certain occasion in Berlin, and for that reason he at least pretended to acquiesce.

After they had waited in the drawing-room for a quarter of an hour the ladies entered.

Aline was ravishing; she was never otherwise; but Stetton himself was struck by the appearance of Vivi, perhaps because he had never before taken the trouble to give her any particular notice.

Her dress was light blue, of some soft material that set off her slender figure to perfection; her face was filled with color and her eyes glowed.

"By Jove," Stetton thought to himself, "Naumann could certainly do worse!"

His friend was thinking the same thing as he heard Vivi's soft voice acknowledging Stetton's introduction.

But within fifteen minutes Stetton was telling himself that he had made a mistake; and, indeed, so it appeared; for as they sat chatting together, Naumann, seeming to forget that the declared object of his attack was Mlle. Janvour, kept his gaze riveted on the face of Mlle. Solini.

"I ought to have known better," said Stetton to himself. "Who could look at any one else when Aline is there?"

He tried to catch Naumann's eye, but the young diplomat took no notice of him.

Aline rang for tea.

"It is too early, I know," she said with a smile; "but we shall be driving at tea-time. Besides, this may be quite correct in Marisi." She turned to Naumann: "You know, I am a stranger here."

"Yes; otherwise I should have seen you," Naumann replied. "Are you to be with us long?"

"For the season, at least."

"And then I suppose you will leave, like every one else who is worth while? You should see Marisi in August! Silent as the grave and hotter than an oven. It is intolerable."

Vivi put in:

"You are here all the year, M. Naumann?"

"Yes, worse luck. For no conceiv-

able reason. The prince invariably goes to Switzerland, and we swelter for nothing."

Tea arrived and Aline poured.

Still Naumann seemed unable to take his eyes from her face, but an acute observer might have thought that it was with an air of intense curiosity, as though he were trying to recall where he had seen her before, rather than one of fascination. This distinction Stetton was incapable of making; he thought only that his friend was succumbing to the irresistible charm of Mlle. Solini, and he grew nervous with fear and displeasure.

"Come," he said to Vivi when tea was finished; "play something."

She walked obediently to the piano.

Naumann left his seat and joined Stetton, who stood near Vivi as she skipped lightly through a tragic piece of Tschaikowsky. It was ludicrous; the girl felt absolutely nothing of the music.

Naumann whispered to Stetton:

"Who is she?"

Stetton looked up.

"I told you. Her father was Pierre Janvour, a Frenchman."

"No; I mean Mlle. Solini. Where is she from?"

"I don't know. Fasilica."

"You don't know?"

"My dear fellow," said Stetton dryly, "I know nothing whatever about her except that you seem to be uncommonly interested in her. Why do you ask?"

"Don't be an ass," said Naumann, moving away and across the room to Aline.

When Stetton and Vivi, tiring of the piano, joined them, a few minutes later, they found them again discussing the disadvantage of being forced to remain in Marisi throughout the summer.

"Really, it is awful," Naumann was saying. "Cheap park concerts, empty hotels, every house on the Drive closed up. Of course, the boss has to stand it with the rest of us, but he is an old elephant with a wife to cool his beer."

"The boss?" Aline looked at him inquiringly.

"Von Krantz, the minister," Naumann explained.

"Oh! Why don't you follow his example and get married yourself?"

"No, thank you," said Naumann with feeling. "I shall never be such a fool."

Aline lifted her eyebrows.

"That is hardly complimentary to us, M. Naumann."

Naumann looked at her.

"I speak from experience, *mademoiselle*. Or, at least, from observation of the experience of others. One thing alone that I have seen was enough to convince me—the experience of a friend of mine, who was also a friend of my father's."

"Indeed?" said Aline. "Tell us about it."

"It is unpleasant."

"That makes it all the more interesting."

Naumann looked at Vivi.

"And you, *mademoiselle*?"

"I should love to hear it," she declared.

The young diplomat seated himself that he might look into Aline's eyes and began:

"This friend of mine—as I say, he was also a friend of my father—was about ten, perhaps fifteen, years older than myself. He was a Russian landowner of noble birth—a man almost without education and yet with a certain strength of intellect that compelled respect and admiration."

"Like all Russians," said Aline contemptuously.

Naumann continued, without noticing the interruption:

"Whenever this man came to Germany on business, which was at least once every year, he paid us a visit. Thus we came to know him well, and to appreciate his finer qualities."

"I used often to have long talks with him. His thoughts were simple and direct as those of a child, and yet his brain was remarkably keen, as was



proved by his considerable material success. In my boyhood he was one of my heroes; I used to look forward to his visits with the utmost interest and pleasure."

Naumann paused, glancing round the little circle of his audience. Stetton was listening with ill-concealed irritation, Vivi in frank interest; Aline had on her face the expression of the hostess who wishes to do her duty by her guest.

Naumann kept his eye on her as he resumed:

"One summer—four years ago it was—his first words on entering our house were to the effect that he had found a wife. He gave us all the details; I remember yet with what eager enthusiasm he recounted the incomparable charms and goodness of his wife.

"He had married the daughter of a peasant on one of his neighbor's estates. When my father spoke to him of the danger of a man marrying out of his own class in society, he replied: 'You are right, Herr Naumann; she is not of my class; she is an angel from heaven.'

"Two years passed, during which our friend visited us two or three times. He had, in fact, become rather a bore; he would talk of nothing but his wife. Then—this was about eighteen months ago, and we had not seen our friend for about a year—I was sent on a diplomatic mission to St. Petersburg.

"On my way back, having some leisure at my command, I suddenly decided to pay a visit to our friend's estate, which I had never seen. I felt sure of a welcome, for he had often invited me to visit him.

"If I had been twelve hours later I should not have seen him, for when I arrived he was making the last preparations for a prolonged journey. I was so shocked at the change in his appearance that I could not suppress a cry of amazement at sight of him.

"His face was sunken and deathly

pale; his eyes gleamed like two coals of fire, as though he were being consumed by some burning hatred or undying grief. At first he would not tell me the nature of his trouble or the goal of his intended journey; but when I expressed a desire to meet his wife he broke down completely and told me everything."

The narrator paused.

He held the interest of his audience now; Vivi and Stetton moved a little closer that they might not miss a word. But Naumann did not look at them; he kept his eyes fastened on the face of Mlle. Solini, who still listened as though with an effort at politeness.

"Two months before, so our friend told me, he had learned of his wife's affection for another man—a young Jew, who had wriggled himself into the position of manager of the estate. He had shot and killed the Jew; but his wife had pleaded for forgiveness with so wild remorse and sincere repentance that he had taken her back. But, naturally, he was suspicious and began to watch her, and soon he discovered—no matter how—that she was slowly poisoning him."

Vivi gasped with horror; Stetton muttered an ejaculation.

Aline had looked away, and was tapping the floor gently with her foot.

"Somehow she became aware of his discovery," Naumann finished, "and made her escape. Our friend's journey was a search for vengeance. I shall never be able to forget the expression on his face as he swore to kill the woman who had broken his heart and ruined his life."

Vivi burst out:

"Did he find her?"

"I don't know. I have never heard from him." Naumann turned to Aline: "Is not that enough to cause a man to forswear marriage?"

"Perhaps; it is a matter of opinion, M. Naumann."

She was still tapping the floor with her foot.

"I call it a deuced unpleasant tale,"

said Stetton. "Come, Vivi; for Heaven's sake, play something lively and get the taste out of our mouths."

He and Vivi moved together to the piano.

Naumann turned round in his chair to make sure they could not hear, then leaned forward and spoke in a low tone to Mlle. Solini:

"I forgot to tell you the name of my friend, did I not, *mademoiselle*? It was Vasili Petrovich, of Warsaw. Every one in that part of Russia knows him—a huge fellow with a black beard and black eyes."

Aline turned and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Indeed?" she said; and though her face was perhaps a little white, her voice was well under control. "He

must be a very interesting man, this friend of yours. It is really too bad you did not get to see his wife; she is, if anything, even more interesting."

"Yes," said Naumann, leaning closer to her; "but I know that she is a beautiful woman, for Vasili Petrovich showed me her photograph, and I would recognize her among a million."

Aline started suddenly, then sank back into her chair.

"Ah!" she breathed, looking into Naumann's face with eyes that gleamed ominously. Then, controlling herself with a visibly extreme effort of will, she rose abruptly to her feet and called to Vivi:

"Come, child; it is time for our drive."

(To be continued.)



**T**HE small runabout was handled well.

I had stopped at the Forty-Second Street crossing of Fifth Avenue to wait a chance to break through the line of crosstown traffic and continue my stroll down the avenue. So in the wait I'd had opportunity to notice the assured manner in which she drove her motor.

Defly, shaving the sides of other vehicles, and—it seemed—running beneath the rearing forefeet of a cab-horse, the girl had wormed her way to the front of the row of carriages and autos, held up by the puissant finger of a traffic cop.

The Jovian figure relaxed, his finger crooked invitingly. I stood a moment longer on the curb to watch how dex-

terously she shot across the tracks, athwart the bows of a huge, battle-ship touring-car, to gain the right-hand curb on her way down-town.

"A girl," I smiled to myself, "who evidently gets what she wants."

Then the people behind me pushed forward, and I forgot her in the hasty scramble across the street.

The air was bracing; it was November, best of months in New York; the sun shone brightly. I breathed in the air and the animated scene.

I noticed with eager eyes the beautifully garbed women, the luxurious equipages, the wealth whose evidences were on every side. It is always thus with me; it always seems new and delectably strange after a sojourn away from the metropolis.

Swinging my stick, my shoulders thrown back, that my lungs might get the best of the fall atmosphere, I continued down the avenue. And then the small, gray runabout caught my eyes again.

The girl could not have been in much of a hurry, after all, for now she was progressing at a snail's pace up the avenue. Evidently she had turned her car but a few blocks below, and she hugged the opposite curb. Out of sheer idle curiosity I slackened my pace and watched her approach.

Young—I set her down as being short of twenty-four—with a wealth of brown hair, a piquant face whose charm not even the motor-veil could hide, and a figure whose liteness was proved by her easy seat behind the wheel, she held for me that indefinable attraction of sex which in my florid youth I would have called "love at first sight," but which I didn't then bother to attempt defining, so content was I with the sensation.

She was heading up the avenue very slowly, throttled down to the lowest notch of speed. I noticed that even hansom cabs were turning out and passing her. I wondered; this was not compatible with the anxiety to get ahead that she had shown a few min-

utes ago. I stopped—again on a corner—and stared.

I saw that she leaned out from the wheel, as though she were searching the face of every foot-passenger on the sidewalk. I noticed that several men returned her glances with grins, but that immediately her gaze would go beyond them and they would go sheepishly past her, not forgetting to cast backward glances at the trim vision in the motor.

And then she beckoned to a man. He was well groomed, smooth-looking, high-complexioned. I saw him start, stare, and then—he smiled the smile of the masher. I felt my fists double as he advanced to her side, lifting his hat. Her motor stopped.

Of course, it was none of my business, and I should have continued on my way; but I did not. Though I'd only had a glimpse of the girl's profile at Forty-Second Street, and though now I could not make out her features as clearly as I should have liked, I knew that she was a lady; further, she possessed attraction for me, and I am not attracted by the sort of woman that condescends to street acquaintances. So I stood—and watched.

She spoke to him, and I could see his jaw drop. Then he grinned. He laid his hand on her arm. I saw her shake off his touch. He repeated it, and as her hand slipped toward the lever his interposing hand stopped her endeavor to start the car. She straightened up and shook off his grip. Again he prevented her from starting the car. I crossed the street.

I am not given much to latter-day chivalry; ladies in distress—from masculine advances—do not appeal to me. Usually they have brought their situation upon themselves. Indeed, the girl in the gray runabout had done that very thing, but—if one always stopped to reason life would be a dull affair.

"I beg pardon," I said to her, "is this—person—annoying you?"

"Beat it, pal," said the man. "Beat it. I saw her first."

I looked at her; her lips were set in a straight line. She seemed very young; and in trouble greater than this mere offensiveness which, indeed, she had seemed to invite. I raised my eyebrows. She nodded. I turned upon the man.

"In just ten seconds," I said, "I am going to knock you down."

His high-colored face paled a trifle; then he sneered.

"Don't hand any of that stuff to me," he said. "You get gay and—"

I smoothed my glove over my knuckles.

"Five seconds gone," I announced. I drew a step nearer him.

He was like all of his breed: brave as a lion when with only a woman to face, but a cur before a man. With a sneer and a look of anger he drew away from me.

"You—you—I hope—"

I took another step toward him; incessantly he turned and fled, leaving his sentence unfinished. I turned back to the girl in the car. She had not started her motor. I looked at her.

"Well?" said I.

A crimson flush burned her cheeks, staining their normal color the lips that had just been white.

"W-will you d-do me a service?" she asked.

"Is that what you stopped that—er—gentleman to ask?" I queried.

"He—he was a beast!" she flared.

"He—looked like a gentleman and—and—I thought—oh, no man is a gentleman—to a woman he doesn't know!"

"Like all statements founded on small experience, that sounds true," said I. "But it isn't—necessarily. What is the nature of this service you wish?"

"Burglary," she answered. "Now—laugh! And go along!"

She reached for her lever again. This time it was I who laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"What do you want burglarized?" I asked.

She stared at me.

"At any rate," she said slowly, "you didn't say what that other creature said. He—he didn't wait for me to ask him anything. He—he said: 'Hello, dear! Going to invite me for a ride?' You—"

"Where is the scene of the burglary to be?" I interrupted. "Who is the victim? What's your reason—and the reward is to be—"

Her lips curled and I found an unsuspected dimple in her left cheek.

"You take it most matter-of-factly," she said.

"According to the insurance companies, there are at least a score of burglaries in this city every twenty-four hours," I said. "That reduces the matter to the prosaic, doesn't it?"

She looked curiously at me.

"You are a strange person."

"I might return the compliment," I replied.

"But I—I am—deadly serious," she said.

"And so am I," I retorted.

And with truth, for that attraction which she held for me was no slight thing. I had gone thirty-five years without having a woman attract me seriously, and now, before her wondrous eyes, deepest violet and fringed with curling, long lashes, I was willing to do anything, no matter how absurd. At least, to be frank, I was willing to listen to anything she might have to say.

"Then—for a perfect stranger—you'd commit—burglary?"

"For you," I told her, "I am willing to do whatever service may be in my small power."

A full half minute our glances met. Then she motioned to the seat beside her.

"Get in," she said.

She pressed the button of the electric starter and we were bowling up the avenue.

At Fifty-Ninth Street she turned west, and a little later we were on Central Park West, a thoroughfare a

trifle less crowded than the avenue. In silence we rode until we reached an entrance to the park; then she turned in and slowed the car down to approximately the same gait that it had been moving at when she had beckoned to our mutual friend, the bounder.

In silence—outwardly. Inwardly I was tumultuous. I have seen many pretty women; for years I had thought myself immune to the fascination of the other sex, but now—the older we grow the more quick we are to revise everything—including ourselves. I was in love—with a pretty girl who wished me to go a-burgling for her!

"You seem," she spoke at length as we reached a deserted roadway—"you seem a gentleman. Also—you helped me a while back when that—person—misunderstood. And you profess willingness to help me further. To—to burgle for me!"

I bowed.

"If you will explain—"

She applied the brakes and the car stopped. She turned her piquant face to me. Again her lips were white and her eyes held a fear in them that was different from the fear inspired by the bounder who had misinterpreted her advances. There was shame in this fear.

"I—I want some letters," she said. "Letters that I wrote."

I felt a little chill down my back. This savored of vulgar intrigue; some indiscretion of a married woman that lacked romance. Then, as I looked into her eyes once more I knew better. She was not that sort; people with her violet eyes can never be guilty of disloyalty.

"Go on, please," I said, as she paused.

She looked straight ahead at the dun trees that, divested of their foliage, loomed gauntly in front of us.

"I—I must get them," she said. "I—I have no brother—there is no one—it had to be a stranger who would not know me, and it had to be a gentleman who would not misunder-

stand. As that beast did!" And her cheeks were red again for a moment.

"Yes?" I encouraged her, as she paused.

"That's why," she continued, "I—spoke to that—person. I had an idea that if I could drive my car along the curb I'd see some one who would look the part—some one who would help a woman in distress."

I hid a smile at the "woman." Though she was twenty-four, she was still a charming girl. Young in speech, young in body, and—young in heart! Heaven bless her, she thought that chivalry still existed; that knights still roamed the pavement eager to succor ladies in trouble. She had that divinest of youth's gifts—faith in her fellow-man. And I—well, a colder man than myself would have warned to her, would have hated to disabuse that faith; would have yearned to face the dragon for her, his lady.

"But I didn't see any one who—looked as though they'd help—on the way down the avenue, and when I reached Thirty-Fourth Street I turned—"

"And found me," I interpolated.

She looked from the dreary trees to me, and a smile made the month June.

"And found you," she said. Her voice became suddenly brisk and businesslike. "You are a gentleman," she said. "I do not know your name, but—" She lifted her hand in protest as my mouth opened to form the words which should disclose my identity. "I don't wish to know," she said. "I—must tell you mine, but—"

"The acquaintance need go no further, you mean," said I. I tried to smile, but it was a feeble effort. "I understand, of course."

"I knew you would," she flattered. "And—and you spoke of reward—if money—but it wouldn't!"

"Thank you," I said. "Never mind the reward. To have done something for you is reward enough," I added tritely yet daringly.

She flushed faintly. She turned out

to avoid another car. It passed, and she drove ahead in silence for a moment. Then she turned again to me.

"My name is Alicia Davenport," she said. She almost ran her words together, so nervous, now that she was on the verge of disclosure of her wishes, that the words seemed to pour from her mouth. "My father is—"

"General Davenport?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes; why? How did you know?"

"Why," said I lamely, "I—the name is familiar—Davenport; and I happened to hear the—the other day that the general had a daughter, so—"

"Of course. Then if you know who my father is—"

"Every one knows that," I told her.

"But even so, you can understand how terrible it is that his daughter should have written letters to—to a cad!"

"Recently?"

Her eyes blazed.

"Years and years and years ago," she cried. "When I was only seventeen! I'm twenty-f— I'm older now."

Well, I hadn't guessed very far wrong; she was either twenty-four or five, and I inclined to the former. It pleased me that I had guessed so closely. Also it pleased me to note that the dimple which mirth evoked could also be summoned by anger. It came with emotion of any sort. I had always known that if ever I did fall in love it would be with a woman whose charms were not exclusively of the time of her good humor.

"Of course," I said, "ever so much older. And now—"

"I want them back." She looked at me. "I can trust you, can't I?"

"I think so," I replied.

The simplicity of my answer seemed to convince her; more, I believe, than any protestations would have done.

"I read a book—seven years ago," she said. So, then, she was twenty-four, not twenty-five. "It was a story

of Balkan princesses and young Americans, and—I thought that the author who could delineate such characters must be a man of gentle instincts and charm himself. I—I idealized him until—I thought myself in love with him. I wrote him a letter; he did not answer, and I wrote him another.

"They were—they weren't mushy things such as girls have written to matinee actors," she said, blushing furiously. "But they were—well, they were the sort of letters a girl of seventeen, who knew nothing of life—or of men—would write to a man of genius whose work had carried her away. They were—silly, but—I'm not horribly ashamed of them now. If he'd been the gentleman I thought he was I'd be proud to think I'd written them to him, but—"

"How do you know he isn't a gentleman," I asked, "if he never answered—"

"As I've grown older," she said, "his very failure to have answered them has made me believe he is a gentleman, but now—a man asked me to marry him yesterday!"

"Indeed? May I hope that—"

For a moment mischief banished fear.

"You may hope nothing," she said with a hint of a smile. "Why should you?"

"Why, indeed?" I asked.

I shrugged my shoulders and folded my hands over the handle of my stick. I felt her eyes curiously upon me as we rolled slowly along.

"I refused him," she said. "He was a—a cad. A beastly cad and his name is—"

"Are you sure that you want me to know that?" I asked.

"Why—n-no—I shouldn't tell that," she said slowly. "It isn't really necessary, anyway. What is necessary is that you should know that when this—this cad was refused by me, he—sneered at me. He said that I held myself too high for him, he supposed, but that I deceived myself.



"He said that a girl who'd write the sort of letters I'd written to Thomas Brownell wasn't such a cut above himself. He said that he'd seen my letters to Brownell; he and Brownell had had many a laugh over them, he said, and that—that's why Brownell isn't the gentleman I thought him when I wrote to him, or have thought him since.

"He—wouldn't answer those innocent letters; he wasn't that sort of a cad; to try to take advantage of a young girl's hero-worship, but—he'd show the letters to his friends and mock me, and—"

"When had your friend—the one you refused—seen these letters? Are you sure he has seen them?"

"How else would he have known of them? And he quoted from them! Oh, I can remember every word that I poured out, in my innocence of seventeen, to the famous romantic novelist, Thomas Brownell." Her tone was bitter.

"And when did your—the person you speak of—see those letters?"

"Why—he's a friend of Brownell's. And that proves that Mr. Brownell is a cad himself, to have such a caddish friend," she blazed.

"Every one makes mistakes," I reminded her gently. "Brownell may not know what sort this friend of his is."

"But they laughed together over the letters," she cried.

"So Brownell's friend says," I answered.

"You seem to defend Brownell. Are you acquainted with him?" she cried.

"Never met him in my life," I answered. "But—when did this person see those letters?"

"You've asked that several times," she cried. "What difference does it make? I can't see. But he said that he'd seen them recently. What difference does it make?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh, detectives ask lots of questions; look for clues, you know. Why

shouldn't a burglar do likewise? Mere curiosity and something to keep the brain busy. And now—you want me to get those letters? Why?"

"Because father has just returned from the Berkshires; he met Mr. Brownell there; became friends with him, and—Brownell is going to dine with us to-night!"

"But still," I protested, "I don't see—"

"A man couldn't," she almost moaned. "And I can't explain. Only—Brownell has kept those letters! He has them now—after seven years. Laughs over them! And I can't refuse to meet father's friend, despise him though I may. I can't tell father why I don't want to meet his new friend. And I'll have to meet Mr. Brownell and—if he didn't have those letters in his possession it would be different!"

"I don't see why," I said mildly. "Then, too, you could be indisposed to-night—"

"I won't run—from any one," she blazed. "And as for seeing why—a man couldn't, I've told you. A woman would understand. She'd know that, if I had my letters back—if Mr. Brownell dared mention them, I could ask him what he meant. I could deny having written them."

"But you wouldn't," I ventured to suggest.

"No—not that; I'll not lie. But, if he has them no longer, I won't feel—at the mercy of a strange man, a cad who's wormed his way into my father's good graces and accepts an invitation to dine with the man whose daughter he's sneered at! If I have those letters back I can face him; I can—oh, you don't understand."

"I think I do," I said. "And—I'll get the letters for you, Miss Davenport."

She applied the brake and the little runabout stopped with a jerk. "You—you will?"

"To-day," I said firmly.

"How?"

"I'm not up on burglary," I smiled, "but—I'll get them."

"And"—for the fraction of a second doubt gleamed in her violet eyes—"you'll give them to me?"

"Why should I not?"

She sighed.

"Men are so—Thomas Brownell writes like a gentleman—you'd think no one but a gentleman could possibly create such characters, but—I trust you!"

She started the little car again with a press of the electric button. We rode a hundred yards. Then she turned to me.

"You—you'll be taking risks," she said slowly. "Perhaps—you'd better not."

"I've said I would," I reminded her. "Let's try to think up a plan of action."

"I'd thought of one," she said. "It's safe—I might have done it myself, only—a girl can't—"

"What was your plan?"

"Father told me that Mr. Brownell lives in an old-fashioned apartment house on Washington Square. On the ground floor. He has only one servant—an old man. If he could be decoyed out of the way—and you could gain an entrance—if you had plenty of keys—"

"I could send a message to the servant—do you know his name, by any chance?"

"He was with Mr. Brownell in the Berkshires. John—John Curtin. Father was so taken with Mr. Brownell that he remembers everything about him—and passes it on to me. Yes! You could tell the servant to be at the Pennsylvania Station with Mr. Brownell's things—a sudden trip—" Her face darkened. "But Brownell might be at home. That would undoubtedly spoil it."

I thought a moment.

"Let's leave the park. Drive to a telephone station; there you can call up this Curtin fellow, find out if Brownell is in; if he isn't, find when

he's expected home. If not for an hour or two—we'll send a messenger to his apartment with a note—"

"The handwriting," she cried.

"We'll send a telegram from up-town," I said. "Then it'll be wired down-town and rewritten."

"Good!" she cried.

The little gray car had plenty of speed; it showed some of it on our way from the park to the nearest drug-store, where Miss Davenport telephoned. She came out of the booth flushed with excitement.

"The servant says that Mr. Brownell is not expected home until six," she cried. "What luck!"

"Yes," I agreed. "And now—for One Hundred and Tenth Street! That's far enough up-town to make certain that our message will not be delivered as I write it, but will be relayed down-town and rewritten."

Twenty minutes later I had sent a telegram to John Curtin, signed by the name of Thomas Brownell, telling the man-servant to be at the Pennsylvania Station at five, as Mr. Brownell was going on a sudden trip to Atlantic City.

"Now?" she said, as I reentered the little car.

"Curtin ought to have a bag packed in half an hour," said I, looking at my watch. "And it is now four o'clock. It will take us half an hour to get down-town."

"Us?" she cried.

"Don't you want the letters as soon as possible?" I asked.

"I do, but—"

"You can wait round a corner," I said. "I'll get them—"

"But how can you be sure you'll get into his apartment?"

"There's a locksmith on Eighth Street, near Washington Square," I answered. "I'll get fifty keys from him."

"But the hall-boys," she objected.

I glowed at her fear for me. It was only natural, still—

"I'll simply say that I am a friend

of Mr. Brownell's, and that I'm looking for the keys he gave me. If I can't find it—well, then we must expect to lose."

Three-quarters of an hour later I was on the sidewalk on Waverley Place, a few rods from the apartment whither I was bound. The girl was alternately flushed and pale.

"Root hard for me," I said.

"Oh—but I can't let you! You might be caught—what does it matter? I won't let you take the risk—you might not find the letters—jail—"

"Too late for that," I said. "I never stop until my purpose is accomplished."

And then I gave her a look beneath which she went deepest crimson; her eyelids fluttered; her glance fell.

"Wait," I said.

Exultantly, my heart pounding, I strode away.

There was no one in the hall. And the lock was of the most simple variety. I opened it with one of the keys on my own ring, needing no recourse to the twoscore keys I had obtained from the locksmith under the specious plea that I'd lost my keys to my own house.

I stepped inside; John, the servant, had departed; was even now cooling his heels in the Pennsylvania Station. I walked through a sort of drawing-room and found myself in the author's study. A desk was open; in a cubby-hole was a little packet tied with ribbon. I took it out. Two letters addressed to Thomas Brownell, and in a masculine hand, was scrawled on the top envelope: "The sweetest letters a man ever received. God bless her gentle heart!"

I opened the envelopes and glanced through the letters. They were all that the superscription indicated. And they were signed in a delicious school-girl scrawl that showed an honest, frank, courageous character; the sort of character that had made the child write to the author her appreciation of his fictitious characters. I sighed.

"Here they are," I said to her a few minutes later.

She clutched them eagerly. She glanced at the addresses and opened the envelopes. Then she looked at me.

"How did you know—these were mine?"

"I read them," I told her.

"You—you read them?"

"How else could I tell the right letters?" I asked.

Vividly, gloriously she blushed.

"I—I was only seventeen," she said. "And I—oh, how can I thank you?"

"You can't," I said. "Did you notice that Brownell has written on them?"

"Y—yes," she said. "He—he can't be such—such a cad as—"

"He'll miss those letters," I said. "If he—if he weren't a cad, I suppose you'd let him keep them, eh?"

She looked at the masculine writing on the envelope.

"He—has earned the right to—but he showed them to—another man—and laughed!"

"I'd forgotten that," I said. "I'm sorry for Brownell. But perhaps when you meet him to-night—let's forget him. I suppose, if I should ask you to tea—"

"Then you would have spoiled it all," she said. "Spoiled the memory of a gentleman who performed a service for a woman and then—"

"Claimed a reward, eh? I see—not chivalry. Then I won't. Good afternoon, Miss Davenport."

There was a catch in her voice.

"G-good-by," she said.

The little gray runabout shot down Waverley Place. I watched until she turned a corner; then I walked over to the Washington Arch and took a bus up the avenue as far as my club. There I ordered a high-ball. As I drank it, at my favorite table in the grill, Tony Gerhart approached me.

"Welcome back, wanderer," he said. "Haven't seen you in a dog's age!"

"Tony," said I, "just when did you see me last?"

"Why, you haven't forgotten, old man! You had a most miserable cold; you were in your rooms, laid up. I came down, and you fell asleep on the couch in your study and I made myself at home—let's see—September, wasn't it?"

"It was," said I.

I signaled a waiter.

"Pen and ink—and paper," I ordered.

The waiter brought them.

"*Billet-doux?*" asked Gerhart.

I looked up at him.

"Tony," I said, "sign this."

He read what I had hastily written.

"Why—why, look here, old man, you—"

"Sign it," I said, "or I'll speak to the governors of this club and—"

He signed it. I carefully folded the paper. Then I spoke to him:

"Tony, this is a gentleman's club. You understand? If a bounder gets in, the gentlemen have a right to cut him. If the bounder doesn't accept the cut, the gentlemen have a right to knock him down, club or no club."

I left him there, gasping for breath. At the door I looked at my watch. It was half past six. I left the club and strode up the avenue. At a house in the Fifties I presented my card. I was ushered into a drawing-room. A few moments I heard the rustle of skirts.

"My father is not at home yet," said a voice in the doorway; "but—"

The voice ceased; the owner advanced hesitatingly into the room and stared at me.

"Is this—the perfect gentleman that—"

She stared at the bit of pasteboard which I had handed the servant at the door, twisting it in her slender fingers. I handed her the piece of paper which Gerhart had signed. She read it aloud:

DEAR MISS DAVENPORT:

I lied when I told you that Brownell had shown me your letters. He had

taken them from a trunk the day I saw them, was sick, asleep, and did not know I had seen them.

ANTHONY GERHART.

She looked at me; she was infinitely more alluring now than in the auto costume she wore in the afternoon. I felt my pulses racing. She took a step toward me.

"You—you—"

"I kept them seven years," I said, "hoping that in the future, when the girl had become a woman, I might dare—"

"I—I don't know," she said slowly, "which I like best. The man who stole the thing he had treasured—from himself—or the author who had treasured—"

"Try to like us both," I said. "Really each of us is a most decent sort, even though—"

"What, here already? Good!" cried a deep voice from the doorway. "Glad you didn't dress, Brownell; we can mull over those books as I wrote you we would; some of the rarest editions that— Oh, Alicia, girl! You know Brownell? I thought you didn't."

"I didn't think I did, either, father," she answered. "But I have known him—since I read his first book."

"Eh, what? You're chaffing me, Alicia." He looked from one to the other of us. "Well, you're acquainted now. Excuse me a minute, will you, Brownell?"

The girl looked at me.

"I—I think it was perfectly awful, your letting me go ahead—what must you think of me?"

"Do you want me to tell you?" I ventured.

"N-no," she said; "not until I've decided to whom those letters really belong."

Then the general came and took her in to dinner.

But she glanced at me over her shoulder, and—I really felt awfully sorry for Gerhart, poor devil!

# Happily Ever After



by

Martha M.  
Stanley



## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

**K**ATHERINE BARNES, from Orton on Cape Cod, marries Joe Chester, a stranger to Katherine's family. From her rigid Puritan upbringing she is taken to New York before going to the Nebraska ranch where Chester lives. Metropolitan life entrances her, as does the kindness of Joyce Arden, Joe's married sister; Nina Fisher, a gay matron; Gales, a great painter, and Mr. Orcut, who is obviously enamored of Katherine.

The one person who strikes her disagreeably is Ed Marker, a sufferer from tuberculosis, who is Joe's dearest friend.

At a dance at Mrs. Fisher's, Orcut becomes so patently indiscreet that Katherine is obviously frightened and insulted.

## CHAPTER V (Continued).

### A WALTZ.

**S**HE recognized the *finale* of the waltz in sort of a stupor.

The music ceased, yet Orcut was still holding her, just that fraction of a second than is necessary when a dance is finished—that flash of time when a woman recognizes the motive of a man, and whether experienced or not, reads him as clearly as if his heart had sprung into type before her.

"We shall have another waltz?" he asked, in half apology.

"No. I shall dance but once more, and that with Mr. Chester."

At the emphasis of her reply, Orcut took her arm a trifle roughly.

"Don't kill the music in your voice like that! You are killing it—you know you are—because," he added humbly, "of something I have inadvertently said or done."

The remark roused a peculiar min-

gling of emotions in Katherine. It was not disgust for the man, nor even dislike; it was fear.

"We are going away in a few days." She managed to speak, but it was with no little effort. "I am afraid I shall not see you again."

She had meant that this remark should signify her disapproval of him and the liberty he had taken. She was young and untrained to the ways of the world, as Gales had said. More than all, she could not appreciate the depth of insult in what appeared a shallow act.

"You will come East again soon?" he asked.

"Not for a year, I am afraid."

He laughed with a shade of unpleasantness not unmingled with triumph, but behind it was a note of unhappiness which he did not intend Katherine should fail to detect.

"That is twice you have said you were afraid. I wish I might know

why. Women are so unexplainable. I thought you were different from the rest," he added in an undertone. "I thought you understood me."

The appeal would have amused Nina Fisher, and challenged to a flirtation most of her guests—that appeal of being misunderstood which men and women alike flaunt when defeated. It roused in Katherine what Orcut had hoped it would—a sense of pity that balanced, as it excused, any familiarity he might have taken.

As Orcut led Katherine to her seat she bowed a little nervously and laid her hand thankfully upon her husband's arm.

"I believe I am sleepy," she whispered.

Joe looked lovingly at the flushed face.

"I know you are, and getting sleepier every day. When we get out at Mahama we shall be glad to rest."

Joe turned to Nina Fisher as she approached them.

"I am going to put a stop to this hilarity," he laughed, "directly after to-night. I promised Katherine's mother and Aunt Emmeline to take care of her, and I am letting her have a year's fling in a month!"

Katherine had not heard. From where she sat she saw Orcut's reflection in the mirror as the man helped him with his coat. Gales joined him, and together they left the house.

Startled by what seemed her long silence, she turned to Joe and asked childishly: "What next?"

"Supper, dear," answered Nina Fisher. "Mr. Orcut had to keep a business appointment, and Harry Gales left with him, but I think Joe can look after two ladies. Joyce has turned down the senator!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### HOME.

In the days that followed Nina Fisher's party Katherine devoted her-

self to packing and buying the few necessary things for their Western journey.

As she folded the dresses and laid them in the trays of her trunk, she paused and wondered why a joy at leaving New York, that she had previously loved so dearly, should completely possess her.

The white chiffon dress, with its dashes of red berries, lay across her arm. She had been almost delirious with delight when she and Joyce had purchased it, but now it seemed to have lost its charm.

True, she had danced her first dance with Joe in it; that alone seemed to hallow it. Again, she reflected with rising color, she had danced her first dance in public with Orcut also in the same gown. Probably, she reasoned, he had held her no closer than Joe. It had been her imagination, after all, but then it was Joe's right to hold her close, quite as it was her delight to feel his strength and approval of her.

With a conscience quieted, she laid the dress in a tray by itself. After all, she was glad it was over, glad in that sort of a way that is a woman's always when she flies from a danger more or less delicious to the protection of a husband.

New York was altogether too delightful, too full of joy. Old Mr. Watkins, the Orton pastor, might have been right, after all, when he said: "In wo hold out; in joy, hold in." She might not have had that peculiar mingling of joy and regret, if she had held her joy in check a trifle more.

Orcut had read her aright, after all. She was, in reality, afraid. Not of him personally—she smiled to herself—though she would prefer not to see him again, but she was afraid of the fascination of the city and its people in general.

Twenty-two years of life in Orton seemed to have maddened her with a desire to learn all outside of it in the short space of time she had been given since her marriage.



Of the fascination of the outside world, as she had been taught it in Orton, she had omitted nothing, it seemed, but bridge and the races. These thoughts occupied her while she packed and even until she and Joe were well on their journey West.

After traveling three days Joe noticed Katherine's weariness at the monotonous sight of countless acres of grain, and, leaning over fondly, said for at least the third time:

"We had a great old lark in New York, didn't we?"

"We surely did," answered Katherine. "What do you suppose mother would say to it all? I saw almost all the wickedness there was, didn't I?"

Joe shook his head and sighed.

"Oh, you little Puritan! Wickedness! Why, you dipped into dinners and a bit of dancing. Had a few teas and drives with Joyce and me, and saw a number of plays—that was all."

Katherine's eyes looked dreamily ahead, as if upon a screen she saw the past reflected.

"I reveled in those plays, though," she said, looking out upon the long, level fields of grain. "I enjoyed every minute of them. I should like to see them every day and night."

"I noticed that. Of all you saw, what ones did you like the best?"

Katherine turned without hesitation and looked frankly at him.

"The problem ones—because I could untangle them myself. Now, the musical comedies kept me guessing all the time. I could never tell whether the star would prove to be the daughter of an earl or a vicar, whether the character woman would marry her lover or her uncle. The only thing I could tell," she added, laughing, "was that the chorus were going to run on and sing it was somebody's wedding-day or birthday until I felt like screaming: 'Yes, yes, I know it—stop!'"

Joe smiled, then knitting his brows, laid down the magazine he was reading.

"What makes you think you could untangle the problem plays, dear? The situations looked very perplexing to me."

"Why, there was so much useless suffering, just because the husband and wife did not go to one another and say frankly: 'I have fallen in love or become entangled with somebody else; I want my freedom.'"

Joe remained quiet for a moment, looking full into the dark, earnest eyes.

"Oh, you inexperienced little girl!" he said at last. "Don't you know if that had happened there would have been no play—at least a very weak one?"

"But those things do not happen in life, Joe. People who start in loving one another love to the end, don't they—like you and me—like mother and father?"

"They should. And," he added reverently, "please God, we shall."

"But I would never forgive a man," argued Katherine, "who so far forgot me as the husband did in the 'The Rose-Path.'"

"That is because you do not understand environment," replied Joe. "Do you remember the night before we were married I read that little conclusion of the fairy tale and suggested revising the phrase, 'lived happily ever after'?"

Katherine made no answer, but shook the dust from her skirt, and, opening her traveling bag, began to wipe the stains of travel from her face. She dashed a little toilet-water upon her handkerchief and bathed her temples; then, closing the bag a trifle petulantly, turned her gaze toward the window again.

"Do you remember?" he repeated.

Katherine shrugged her shoulders.

"I remember something about 'forgiving one another to the end'; but I thought it was absurd. A woman would lose her self-respect doing a thing like that."

"The wife in 'The Rose-Path' did not," argued Joe. "She retained her

self-respect, and for it doubled her husband's respect for her."

"Oh, but that was in a play!" replied Katherine. "Just think how that woman suffered. She really should have got even with him."

"And suffered more?" Joe took the wary, vibrant hand and closed his own over it. "Oh, you dear, little inexperienced woman! Dear, impulsive and untaught! That play was taken from life."

Something in the strength of his hand-clasp reassured her, and she looked up at him with the old light of trust and confidence.

"You yourself are all right, Joe. It's other people that are wrong. Are we almost home?"

Joe nodded. The question had a contented ring about it, and warmed his heart toward the future as it increased his courage for his business. It had been a long, hard, lonely five years at Mahama. Workmen—satisfactory workmen—had been scarce.

In the first years of his inexperience many of his cattle had been stolen, though his brand had been plainly stamped upon them. A number of Mexicans had drifted in, and with their entry cattle had drifted out. But now Joe's brand shone on clear flanks from his own stock that showed no previous blending of letters, seared even deeper by a former owner.

He had in the past five years seen his cattle tremble and go down in a drought, his corn wither and swept by cyclone; he had gone to his room at night, figuring just how soon he might sell and at how small a loss. He would no more than have his calculations complete than some neighboring ranchman would come over with a story of his experience at starting. It would always be enough worse than Joe's to cause him to take courage again.

"Stay right on, boy," a neighbor had said, "and beat that coyote Henshaw up here to the north of you. He's yellow, that man—he and all his tribe.

He's got a daughter, too, as yellow as he, though they do say that she is all that has saved him from a lynching many a time."

Contrasting his past discouragements with his present hopes, his heart swelled with delight as he sat looking at Katherine.

She was really his—really going out to Mahama. She would be there at midday, the hour he strangely dreaded most to be alone.

Midday was neither the beginning nor end of the day's work or the day's perplexities. It was the upset hour when everything was chaos.

Then, he reflected again, Katherine would be there at night, in the long, lonely evenings; and, instead of the grinning face of Mito, his Mexican man who had attended him, there would be dear, old faithful Mrs. Lund—Ben Lund's widow—to tend them both and serve their dinner under the light of the large reading lamp.

In the morning, to give him courage for the day, Katherine would be there. Nothing would be difficult now. What had seemed serious questions before would now be easy of solution.

He roused from his reverie as the sights became familiar before approaching the city.

"We change cars at Omaha," said Joe. "I see the porter is already brushing up."

"And from Omaha to Deval is sixty miles?"

"Yes," answered Joe, delighted at the light of happiness in Katherine's eyes. "Tell me the rest of the journey, dear."

"And from Deval it is ten miles in a carriage to Mahama."

"And what is there at Mahama, Katherine?" he asked hungrily, compelling her to speak the word.

"Home," she whispered.

Joe rose with a sense of joyful importance as the porter reached for Katherine's wraps.

"I'll assist the lady myself," he said, and, slipping a bill into his hand,

nodded that he might consider himself fortunate to attend to her luggage even.

After the change was made, Katherine found the train to Deval bore a vastly different crowd than the one they had left. The hats of the men were wider, their faces more tanned. The women walked with a stride, carrying a breeze as they sped though the train in search of a seat. One set down her valise with such force that a cloud of dust rose from its contact with the floor. Notwithstanding it was heavy, the woman kicked it along with her foot and sat down with the freedom and assurance of a man.

Katherine nodded toward the floor as she touched Joe's arm.

"Not much like Nina Fisher's dancing slippers, are they?"

Joe could not repress a smile as his eyes fell upon the broad, low-heeled shoes of the woman.

"She lives up the line a piece farther. Married to a Swede, they say, about half her size."

The train pulled into Deval, and Katherine stepped upon the platform of the station and looked round her.

A few raw-looking boys, mostly legs and arms, grasped their hats by the crowns, and with averted eyes saluted rather than bowed to Joe. Katherine was a new kind of woman to them—an object for side-glances and respect.

A few Indians in the partial dress of civilians stalked like animated pines beside the train even yet, not quite accustomed to the mysterious power that set the train in motion.

A little half-breed Mexican grinned and shot sharp, admiring glances at Katherine as he took her baggage. Joe led her to an open wagon with a wide seat in front and an open space for the trunks behind. Two fine horses, hitched to the conveyance, sniffed nervously as the train pulled out.

As she took her seat beside Joe she listened silently to Mito as he threw the trunks in the rear.

With eyes fixed on the afterglow,

she could not speak. Whether it was the silence left by the departing train, the melancholy of a quiet twilight, the distance that separated her from her mother, or the wild freedom of the plains, she could not tell. There was borne upon her a feeling of desolation, and as she felt her voice choking she reached over and took Joe's hand.

"Great, isn't it?" he said. "This open country, this freedom to work and think, this open wagon with no top to it. There was a canopy," he explained still further, "all fringed and fussy-looking, but I had the fool thing pulled off. Had new cushions sent from Omaha, too."

"First," he resumed happily, "I thought of getting a buggy or a little surrey, maybe a dog-cart, but every one I saw had 'tenderfoot' written all over it. I knew you would not like them either. I was just as sure, Kit," he whispered, leaning closer, "from the minute I saw you, that you were the girl for this open country as I could be. I told Ed Marker so, too."

"What did he say?"

Urged by a complexity of emotions, Katherine had a peculiar, irritable desire to know what Joe's best friend would say of her and her position as Joe's wife.

"Oh," he answered with that characteristic logic of his—said women were all right when they were pleased and were given the sights and sounds they were accustomed to having. I told him right away that life in Orton had begun to bore you already, it was too cramped. What you wanted was liberty, freedom. I have to tell Ed a thing or two myself now and then."

"He never had a sweetheart, I suppose."

Katherine could not imagine a woman submitting to endearments from Marker.

"No, that is one of the things that is so noble about him. He keeps away from women."

Joe looked curiously at his wife.

"You don't like Ed, do you? That's

because you do not understand him. That's why, another winter, if he is still spared to us, I want him to come out here and have you get better acquainted. You are tired, dear; that's all."

With Mito's face straight ahead, Joe could well afford to steal his arm round Katherine and draw her head to his shoulder.

Under the starlight there seemed endless acres of grain and corn, but no lights, no homes.

"Look closely, Katherine," said Joe, "over there to the right. See those three dim lights? That's our house at Mahama, and over to the left about a quarter of a mile are the quarters for the men."

"And the cattle—where are they?"

"Back of the range of hills yonder—ten thousand acres for them!"

"My, what a lot!"

"It is really a small ranch, dear, compared to some. Think of them when they cover miles and miles, even townships of corn—as Buck Henshaw's, twenty miles above here!"

Katherine sat quietly musing by Joe's side. In the little town of Orton she had been known and loved as Kitty Barnes; every one had known her. In her three weeks in New York Joyce had seen that she met every one of her set worth while. They had been companions, friends, delights. Here she felt lost, even before reaching her home—lost in the immensity of the West!

The horses were reined up in front of the house, a one-story bungalow sort of a place, with wide verandas and long, low windows.

Lights gleamed from every room, and, crossing the light of the parlor, a woman, motherly in stature and bearing, came to the door and extended her hands.

"This is Mrs. Lund," said Joe. "She takes care of us now that you have come. Before," he added, "I shifted for myself, with no one but Mito to care whether I was ill or well. Eh, Mito?"

The Mexican grinned and nodded a trifle sadly. He did not approve of Mrs. Lund. He was too good a cook and caretaker himself; and then, too, his dignity had been offended, as his power had become usurped. For this he could never quite forgive the American *señor*.

The journey had been long and tiresome, and, dinner being over, Katherine retired early, Mrs. Lund assisting her with genuine pleasure. The trunks were already in the room, lined up against the wall—her two and Joe's one.

"Now, you just lay right down," said Mrs. Lund, puffing the pillows, "and give me the keys to your trunks and I'll shake out and hang up what will crush and put them in the cedar closet here. Mr. Chester had the closets lined," she added proudly—"lined with cedar, which is expensive, too, against the bugs. The grasshoppers cut clothes—cut like a knife."

Katherine lay, her hand on her head, sleepily watching Mrs. Lund as she unpacked the trunk.

"Law sakes!" exclaimed the woman. "You will excuse me, I know; but what made you bring these beautiful things? Just to cheer my old heart, I'll bet a cent! We'll make some flannelette house dresses together next week. You'll need them, for it's cold out here."

Katherine essayed a sleepy "all right," but opened her eyes a bit wider as Mrs. Lund drew out the evening dresses.

"Oh, my life and my heart!" she ejaculated. "Are these wonderful things dresses?"

"Just evening dresses, Mrs. Lund," answered Katherine. "Lay them over the chair for to-night. I want to fix them myself in the morning."

Mrs. Lund approached the bed, holding the gown of white chiffon and holly-berries uppermost.

"There ain't any place to wear these out here," she said, lifting cloud after cloud of the filmy stuff in her

large, coarse hands. "Besides, these posies are all squeezed together."

Katherine reached out her hand and mechanically pulled the leaves into shape. Her hand, though sleepy, wandered to the shoulder of the bodice, where a small cluster had rested against the warmth of her neck; but the berries were missing.

Any accident that had befallen her beloved New York clothes was enough to rouse her.

"Look in the tray, Mrs. Lund," she said, raising herself upon her elbow, "and see if a cluster of buds like these on the skirt are there."

Mrs. Lund searched in vain.

"Nothing but a fan, Mrs. Chester, and a pair of long gloves."

The dress was laid across the chairs at Katherine's direction, and then Mrs. Lund tiptoed round the room, and finally lowered the flame of the lamp before she stole noiselessly out.

In the dim light she saw the billows of chiffon sink lower and lower upon the chair, as if they had been throbbing and were glad at last to settle down and rest. Then, faintly, in the distance, came the sound of Mito, stabling the horse, and the tread of Joe, until sounds grew softer and softer, and finally ceased altogether.

"It is stifling here. That is what is the matter! No, you are holding me too close. Don't look at me! I tell you—I am not afraid!"

Katherine struggled, trembled, and opened her eyes.

Beside the bed Joe was kneeling, his arm round her.

"Dearest," he cried, "you are dreaming! Lund keeps this house too hot, anyway. There, there," he added, patting her into sleepiness again, "I'll open the window a trifle more."

He threw the shutter wide and fastened the window sufficiently high to let in the fresh chill of the night. Returning, he knelt by her side, and she listened, half asleep, to the words of comfort and welcome.

"It is all strange out here at first,

Kit, and the trip was pretty long. Perhaps we should have stayed overnight in Omaha and have come tomorrow, but I was so anxious to get you home."

He leaned the flushed face against his breast.

"Listen!" he said; "how quiet it is outside—not a sound for miles and miles. We are like two little specks in this big West, but we are together. That's the charm of it. I do not have to be lonely any more."

He smoothed the soft hair and laid his lips upon the cool, low, white forehead.

"Say it again, dear," he whispered, trembling with the joy of having her alone beside him.

Sleepily she lifted her arm about his neck. The soft, clinging tenderness of ribbon bows, light lace frills, and faint perfume intoxicated him, and he closed his eyes to drink in the welcome music of her voice.

"I love you, Joe," she breathed, her arm tightening, "the best in all the world! I'm glad"—she faltered, with a little quaver in her voice—"that we came right home—when we did."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE.

WHEN Katherine opened her eyes the following morning the room presented a bare, lonely aspect unlike the night before. The few pieces of furniture and pictures pasted about the walls that had shone cheerful enough in the light of the large table-lamp the night before now glared gray and cold in the pale light of a blinding storm.

Not a sound could be heard within the house as Katherine raised herself upon one arm and listened. The wind, driving from the east, had completely obliterated the view from one window, and thus her attention was doubly attracted within.

Joe's traveling clothes lay upon one chair and the scattered contents of his closet lay upon another. He must have left hurriedly and early, too; everything bore the marks of haste.

The trays of his trunk lay piled upon the floor, and shirts and cravats were tossed about in reckless confusion. Katherine sat staring from the bare floor, with only the tiny rug beside the bed, to the pile of filmy dresses still lying where Mrs. Lund had left them.

A sob rose in her throat as she closed her eyes and reflected upon the change. She had married Joe for love; she had come with him to this Western country for love—anxious to begin her life with him and for him; but somehow the terrible quiet of the house and its isolation made the recollection of the little home in Orton seem very dear and beautiful.

She turned and looked at Joe's watch that lay upon the table beside her. Eight o'clock! Her mother and Aunt Emmeline had been up for hours.

Her own room, with its dark-red carpet, its white fur rug, its pretty wall-paper and pictures, its brightly-colored counterpane, seemed to hold a more delightful memory than ever upon this her first morning in her new home at Mahama.

She stepped cautiously out of bed and lifted the dresses from the chair. They were still fragrant with violets, such violets as grew behind her Orton home. As she searched in vain for the missing holly-berries her thoughts flew to Joyce, and then to the nearing Christmas.

How good Joyce had been, how thoughtful! She pictured her in the dainty morning gown of soft blue, with lace and ribbon hanging from her sleeve as she served the coffee. What a picture Joyce had made against the dark woodwork of her dining-room upon whose walls, in narrow grooves, or shelves, rested old bronzes and copper plates from the Arden family.

How gently the maid had entered bearing the toast covered with a snowy, fringed napkin, and how warm and cozy the place had always been!

Then the joy of hearing the constant sound of life in the streets, the roar of traffic, and the call to join the world!

As she stood, moist-eyed, recalling it all, Mrs. Lund entered, even without knocking, bearing a tin tray a trifle discolored and bent at the edge.

Upon it there slopped a lukewarm cup of coffee, a few slices of bread, and some canned berries.

"You do sleep, don't you?" said Mrs. Lund, depositing the tray upon the edge of the table and taking no note that she had left it tottering upon Joe's watch.

"Better put your shoes on; you don't want to get cold and get sick, 'cause there ain't no doctor this side of Deval, and he's most generally seldom to home."

Katherine began a search for her slippers.

"Where's Mr. Chester?"

"Law sakes!" replied Mrs. Lund, as she nervously touched the gowns which Katherine had laid upon the bed. "He went out shortly after five. The cattle ain't been half sheltered for the winter, and then there's a heap of talk about a mine on the south side of the ranch. Old Buck Henshaw is looking into that, and Mr. Chester wants to beat him to it. Henshaw claims it runs onto his land."

Katherine tasted the coffee and pushed it gently aside. It was not only cold, but burned.

"How long have you known Mr. Chester?" she asked.

"Two years. I reckon, ever since I've been a widow. He sort of helped me out, bought my little strip of land for me, and seen I didn't get cheated. It was him as told me to bring you the breakfast, instead of eating in the kitchen, as he did."

"Did Mr. Chester say when he would be back?"



"No, but I cal'clate long about noon. Mito went along with him."

Katherine managed to eat the bread and berries, and passed the tray to Mrs. Lund.

"You may go now," she said, "and I'll fix up in here. I like to look after my room myself."

Mrs. Lund walked hurriedly out and shut the door with a bang. Not to see the entire contents of those trunks was a keen disappointment.

Fighting the desire to sit down and cry, Katherine bravely picked up the gowns, shook them, and hung them in the closet. It took courage to put the New York clothes out of sight. She would wear them again in Omaha—maybe.

Even the dreary storm would clear away; she would teach Mrs. Lund how to cook; then she and Joe would build cozy-corners, window-seats and shelves for magazines and books.

She stood a moment by the window, watching the snow blow and drift, a white sheet from a white space beyond to a white world beneath. Occasionally the vertical waves of it parted obliquely enough for her to discern a grayish-brown house with wide chimney and small, snow-incrusted window-panes. There must be many of them, she reasoned as she turned away, that were hidden by the curtains of snow.

It was no light task arranging Joe's belongings. He seemed to possess an abundance of everything. It was plain to be seen that, instead of bothering with a laundry, Mito had allowed him to buy new collars whenever a number became soiled, until there must have been a hundred or more.

Some one, she laughed to herself, had certainly got to take care of Joe, as he himself had stated, and walk behind him picking up his things.

In unpacking the trunks she found a few photographs of her family, her friends, and Joyce. These she tacked up on the walls or stuck in the edge of the mirror.

Then there were old ribbon bows which she had bought, too soiled for wear, but with which, by turning, she could decorate the chairs.

She had just thrown the log-cabin quilt of Aunt Emmeline's making upon the bed when a quick knock sounded upon the door, and, without waiting for a response, Joe entered.

"I knew what you were doing the minute I heard the sound of that hammer," he cried joyfully. "I bet to myself coming along that you were fixing up and making it look like home. Did Lund bring your coffee?"

"Yes, and berries and bread."

"That's the stuff! I was lucky to get her. So long as you are well taken care of, I didn't make much fuss about fixing up here. We'll live outdoors, anyway, when the spring comes. Say, Kit," he added, throwing a coat on his knee and drawing her to it, "the boys actually think there's a mine on this place—a part of one, anyhow. Won't that be a find, though?"

"Splendid! When can we go and look the place over?"

Joe grew thoughtful.

"We won't be able to do much chasing round until spring. The snow has started in, and Heaven knows when it will hold up long enough for you to ride horseback. I felt the chill driving over last night, didn't you?"

"Maybe that was it," replied Katherine. "But storms shouldn't bother. I come from New England, where storms are made."

In the days and weeks that followed the prospects of a mine forbade much time for conversation about affairs of the house.

An excitement had been roused that could best be talked over in the homes of the workmen. In the enthusiasm of each day, chiefly among the men, Christmas and New Years even bore little semblance to the festive days in her own home. Wedding-gifts had been so numerous that Christmas gifts were almost forgotten.

The dinner, and Joe's delight at hav-

ing Katherine about, counted a change quite sufficient for his happiness. Strong, loving man that he was, he did not think in his blind affection of the change in the life of his wife.

Katherine and his business constituted his life, and he was content. Thus latent in his mind, there was a thought that in like manner, he and her idleness would fill her hours with quite the same contentment.

With Joe, weeks and months sped on, while with Katherine in her entirely new surroundings the hours seemed to crawl, with occasional jumps of the dial in the shape of home-papers and magazines.

Katherine had taught Mrs. Lund to cook many of the dishes which Joe liked, but this most estimable though shiftless woman never seemed to be able to make the journey from kitchen to dining room without chilling the food until it was unpalatable.

The neighbors had been kind enough to call, though upon such visits Katherine exercised no little charity to construe their curiosity into friendship.

Mrs. Davis, the most garrulous of all, who lived a mile or more away, was quite as full of news of the affairs at Mahama as the *Orton Bulletin* had been of the happenings to its townsfolk. Not the slightest occurrence escaped her.

Then Mrs. Follis who lived but ten minutes' walk from the house had called upon two or three occasions, and each time had devoted her conversation to the long-lost past in which she and Follis had seen better days.

The wives of the cattle-men were good enough and large hearted—every one had said. Large-heartedness seemed to be the quintessence of companionship. No one who had studied the physique of these women could imagine the incongruous combination of a small heart within such a frame.

They expressed desires for her happiness in voices that would have made an auctioneer famous, and they brought in pails of cream so full that they

slopped over on the table-cover and rugs.

Their goodness was disgustingly superlative and because of it, Katherine seemed at a loss to know in just what manner and how great quantity her calls and gifts should be returned.

Early in April, however, Joe's desires prompting her, she started out to make a tour of the place, accompanied by Mrs. Lund.

There were a few Mexicans, a number of Swedes and a peculiar brand of Americans called cowboys. They were not the kind depicted on the stage and in story books with wide-brimmed hats, loose shirts, red neckerchiefs and belts filled with cartridges, knives and guns. Neither did they fly by on horseback, whooping as they went.

They were a sullen, coarse, skin-covered set of fellows who felt no more compunction at sticking a sick steer behind the ear than they would in shoving a plough point into the earth.

A number of women left their butter-making, their scrubbing and cooking, long enough to come out and exchange greetings with Mrs. Lund, but they stared boldly at Katherine, while they questioned Mrs. Lund about her and her tardy calls quite as frankly as if she had been born of another tongue as well as of another environment.

As she walked slowly back to the house, Katherine saw Mito coming from Deval with the mail. The saddlebags were quite full and she chided herself for wondering what life would be in that country of freedom if it were not for a line or a light from the country of restraint.

She and Joe, in the lull of business, made two trips to Omaha during the winter, but they were hotel visits, where the kindest voices were those of the hired chambermaids or waiters. The whole city was strange. The stores offered charm a-plenty, but it was dead charm, unaccompanied by a familiar voice sharing her enthusiasm.

The drives out of the city, along the rolling road, past the scrupulously

clean buildings and pavements were filled with an unmistakable monotony. More than all, to this was added the feeling that the journey was taken for her recreation at the expense of duty on the ranch. The theaters even, were catering to the grand opera and oratorio lovers, or else, to the variety loving public.

A straight, well-told story in the form of a play like "The Rose-Path" did not seem to find its way to Omaha.

So it was, with no great disappointment that she agreed to return with Joe to Mahama a day or two earlier than she had anticipated.

When, upon the last of May, Katherine asked about the intended trip East, Joe replied evasively: "We shall have to wait, dear. Blake has left for a vacation—hasn't had one in four years; and then Follis is down with pneumonia. I can't leave now, but of course if,—"

"Oh, I wouldn't go without you," interrupted Katherine.

"Maybe round October or November," he continued sadly. "Somebody has to build a station at Potsar, and I might as well do it, now I'm settled here."

There was a horrible sound of finality about that word "settled"; Katherine felt it sink upon her heart with the weight of lead.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," began Joe, "we'll figure to go East round Christmas anyway, and then we'll bring your mother, Ed Marker, and maybe Joyce back with us for the winter!"

"Joyce wouldn't come."

Katherine turned away and walked to the window.

"Why, for goodness' sake? She follows me round everywhere usually."

"She would not leave New York. It is too lovely."

Joe slowly opened the door and walked out into the sunlight. It was growing hot, and he sauntered over to the shed and sat down in the shade.

He was perfectly satisfied with the West, his business and Katherine. Why should she not be equally content with him? Were not his prospects, her prospects? Thus, he reasoned, blind like all men, unknowingly blind.

Always Joyce had thought for him as well as with him. Joyce was no less a woman than Katherine, but here again, he reasoned blindly. Men forget, sometimes wilfully, sometimes innocently, that the law that makes demands of one's own kin is vastly different from the law that makes them at the call of sex.

The attention that husbands and wives forget, are the attentions that cause many a matrimonial rupture. Then, one's kin comes in and makes allowances, understands in a parental or filial sort of a way. While it comforts, it does not satisfy, and so the call goes out again to another woman or another man—an endless stream of discontented, self-pitied misunderstood creatures.

In the cool of the summer evenings, Joe arranged that Katherine should ride a fine, little Mexican mare that Mito had gradually broken to the saddle.

As a surprise to her, he bought a cross-saddle like his own, only smaller, and then led her out to show her the steed complete.

"Why, Joe dear!" she cried in dismay. "You don't expect me to ride astride do you, like a man?"

"Certainly, it is safer and a divided skirt is perfectly modest."

Katherine sat down in the doorway of the shed and looked appalled.

"What is it, Katherine?"

Joe's eyes were fastened on the fringed saddle with its shining buckles and new leather mountings.

"It is all so different," she explained. "We never go to church. There is no society here. We never have time to go to stay any length of time even in Omaha. I'm as brown and burned already from this Western sun

as the native dairy-woman. I go gunning with you Sundays even, and play cards for your diversion. I was not brought up to it, Joe," she added, "and now you want me to unsex myself by riding astride!"

Joe unbuckled the saddle and threw it in the shed.

"I am sorry, Katherine; I try to please you." Somehow, he had fancied that his idea of pleasure for her must be her idea of pleasure for herself. "I gave you the time of your life in New York. I thought you would remember it."

"That is the trouble, Joe," she answered frankly. "I do." She paused a moment, then added: "You were different there. Somehow I thought you decorated every place you went. In my home town you were so superior to every one else, and in New York you seemed born for the drawing-room. But I was mistaken," she continued with the slightest curl of the lip; "your native element is here—out in this lonely, open country!"

"Well, what's wrong about it?"

Joe was unbuckling the mare's bridle with pitiful disappointment.

"It's not the country that's wrong; it's its effect upon you, a college-bred, God-fearing Eastern gentleman! Your ideas are different here, your actions—even your manner of conversation. You, whom I love dearly, are permitting yourself to become not only acquainted with these common cattle-men, low Americans, Swedes, and Indians, but you are actually growing fond of them. You will have to pardon me, Joe, if I quote your own words, 'environment has got you!'"

"Well, what's the matter with the environment, Katherine?" he asked doggedly. "My business is here. I don't see any reason why I should become 'New England' for you, any more than you should become 'out West' for me. I can't play the prude with these cow-punchers!"

"The prude is the last thing I want you to be," she replied emphatically,

"I want these men to see a difference between you as their master and their neighbor, workman. I treat the neighbors kindly enough, but I make them see a difference between us."

"The women are not working for you—that's different. I took you over to Deval twice to church, and you did not like it."

Katherine laughed.

"No wonder, Joe. Couldn't you see that the service was more like a debating society or a political meeting? Why, men leaned up against the wall and smoked and chewed tobacco, and several refused to remove their hats when the minister prayed! That wasn't church," she continued sarcastically; "that was a rural play!"

Joe walked beside her slowly back to the house.

"You didn't have to watch the crowd, Kit. The parson was handing out the stuff you wanted. That, it seems to me, is the way you ought to do with me. Don't keep your eyes and ears open for these people and their manners; keep them open for me. My interests are yours, aren't they?"

"Yes," she answered slowly, "they most certainly are. But while you are building up your interests I wish that I might build their location."

"Oh, Kit, dearest Kit," he exclaimed with the old tenderness, "you have so little experience even yet! I wish I could set this ranch down on Madison Avenue for you, but it can't be done until I can turn it into gold. I have taken you to Omaha several times, but you didn't seem to like that, either. I'm so sorry!"

"So am I," she whispered. "Be patient with me, Joe, will you? I am trying so hard to be broad-minded and contented and root the old New England system out of me!"

For many days Joe pondered over this conversation. He could not see why his attempt at her happiness as his wife had failed. Surely, had he been placed as she was, he would have been not only content, but ambitious.

But, though half a year removed, the three weeks of dream delight in New York were ever rising up in vivid contrast to the life that stretched before Katherine.

The thousand harmonies of nature were discordant when contrasted with the stringed orchestra at Nina Fisher's dance. The huge drop-curtain with its sunset tints rose daily on the same quiet scene. The welcome faces of friends were forever obliterated by those of women who could never understand her. At times she saw her opportunities fading, just as she saw the laces and chiffons cracking and separating into strings. The buds and ribbons had lost their freshness.

Had Joe been a brother she would have helped him make his pile and coaxed him to take her East.

But Joe was the mate who had answered her call. A fresh, clear call through the iris-odored, wet reeds of New England. He had come and taken her away, and she had followed that call whose music lures mankind. Now, with a lifetime of the West before her, the god of love seemed to have hidden himself in the miles and miles of waving corn. He was out there, weeping somewhere.

Katherine knew, were she to go away, she could not take him with her. He would always be within the sight and sound of Joe.

Early in September the men renewed their excitement about the mine. Potsar station was well under way, and Blake had resumed charge.

Standing by the veranda-post, Katherine watched Joe as he made the turn by the corral and down the road toward the house.

Twice she saw him turn and look behind, then, striking the spurs to the animal, she saw him swing his hat in the air and come bounding down the trail.

Behind him, riding astride, flying like the wind, came a girl, her long, reddish-yellow hair blowing in the breeze.

She was clad in a divided skirt of khaki and red shirt-waist. It was evident she had urged a race.

Above Joe's laugh Katherine heard the girl shout, saw her sit the saddle as if grown to, the animal, and, rushing up the path, swing round the veranda a horse's length ahead of Joe.

"Howdy!"

The girl threw one leg over the pommel and bowed like an old acquaintance.

"This is Miss Henshaw, Katherine," said Joe. "Her father owns an immense tract up above here."

"Yep," answered the girl. "Dad's the king-pin of this section. I just wanted to show Mr. Chester," she continued, "that dad knew what horseflesh was, too, when he bought me this mustang!"

Katherine smiled.

"You certainly know how to ride. Will you come in?"

"Me? Lord, no! What'd I do in a house! I ain't seen a hat and gloves since we left Dallas!"

"You like it here, don't you?" asked Katherine.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Like it! Well, what in blazes is a girl goin' to do when her paw buys half the State? Got to get joy out of life where he is, eh?"

She ran her hand under her long hair and tried to knot or braid it for the remainder of the ride.

"I'm goin' to get everything there is out of life out here," she resumed, "and everybody, too. Did you see me get Mr. Chester's goat on that race?"

Katherine laughed.

"You had better come in," she urged.

"Nope. Thank you just the same, but paw is waiting 'bout ten miles up above here. So long!"

She leaned over and tweaked the ears of Joe's mare.

"What's her name—Turtle?"

Like a flash she was gone, making the turn about the house and up the road.

Katherine stepped to the edge of the veranda laughing a trifle hysterically.

"Who is she, Joe—do tell me?"

Joe shook his head and dismounted.

"Old Buck Henshaw's girl. Never saw her before; only heard about her."

In various doors men stood staring after the flying figure.

"Looks like a four-legged Eva Tanguay, doesn't she?" asked Joe.

"I never saw Eva Tanguay," replied Katherine, and then continued disdainfully: "I was wondering whether she ever dismounted or just grew on the horse."

"Rides splendidly, doesn't she?" continued Joe, still looking after her.

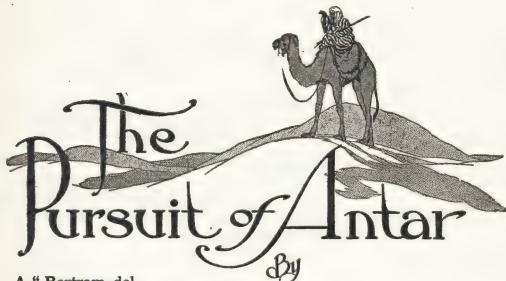
"Her name is Brinda, I believe. But the men call her Brindie or Brinnie, for her reddish hair."

"She's terribly coarse, Joe," resumed Katherine, "and no wonder. Nothing but a ranchman for a father and no mother living."

"Poor thing," said Joe tenderly. "She's awfully good-hearted, and in spite of her being a little rough, one cannot help but like her."

"She fits into the country," he added, "and is a right good sport."

To be continued.



A "Bertram del  
Colpo" Story

By  
Mary Linda Bradley

**T**HE way up the rocky, volcanic hill to the Benedictine monastery of Monte Zaldino was hardly more than a mule-track, now twisting through olive-groves, now breaking across the sun-steeped open in sight of the vivid, lustrous blue of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

This was new country to Bertram del Colpo. He had never fared so far south and west of the Umbrian Marches.

The outlaw leader's mission, this November of 1772, was a difficult one.

Rizzo, the youngest member of the band, had been sent to Frascati with money to purchase a large quantity of the famous wine. At Frascati Rizzo had encountered a girl of Zaldino, postponed his buying to follow her home, and spent his funds.

Bertram arrived two days too late to prevent Rizzo's attempt to rob Abbot Albertus; the expedient failed. Rizzo disappeared, and Bertram, who had so lately escaped from captivity at Fabriano, was on his way to succor another captive.



Unless Rizzo had been promptly delivered up to justice, there was a chance of securing his release by appeal to the abbot, supplemented by donations and penance.

The great wall of the monastic enclosure attained, Bertram rang a modest peal at the gate and, having desired private intercourse with the abbot, was introduced into his presence.

Bertram told Father Albertus the truth regarding Rizzo's errand, but described himself as the wild youth's merchant uncle, anxious to save his ward from the disgrace of exposure.

The abbot, a gaunt, bearded man with a beak of a nose that formed a thin, bony partition between the close-set, penetrating eyes, heard the Scottish adventurer's rôle of anxious uncle without interruption. In reply, he stated with perfect courtesy and sympathy that he could recall nothing of such a matter.

"Word was brought to me from my nephew, incarcerated in Monte Zaldino. Possibly the reverend father has not been fully informed!" Bertram shot at a venture.

"Ah, that! Um—yes, my son, I do seem to remember now. A wild lad! He professed penitence and desire to atone by a period of prayer and fasting. His penitence lasted till opportunity for escape offered. The incident slipped my memory."

"He escaped, then?"

There was a faint, unguarded note of triumph in Del Colpo's voice. The abbot's forehead seamed itself into a mighty frown.

"He has escaped justice," he answered.

Del Colpo was almost convinced. He expressed regret at uselessly disturbing Father Albertus. The Benedictine's mien became more urbane.

"At least you must stay for our frugal meal. It is after noon. I will send word to the brother who ministers to the guests. Perhaps you would be interested to see the monastery?"

This was exactly what the Scot did want. He accepted the offer, and for more than an hour wandered alert and questioning over the great pile. The attendant brother seemed to have nothing to conceal, though Del Colpo was particularly curious in viewing the dungeons and in secluded parts of the monastery.

He constantly whistled a short, quaint air containing four high, predominant notes. The monk's withered mouth frequently twitched a little at the corners.

Guide and guest appeared at the appointed hour in the refectory. Sitting at the abbot's table, Bertram munched his bread, consumed the vegetable soup that was made largely of pure olive oil, and drank his share of common wine.

The Scot noticed that a change had come over Father Albertus. He was pale, restless, and forgot to take pains to seem at ease. He was not listening to the brother who real aloud.

Nor were the other monks attending. There was an air of smoldering excitement in every one of the community. Even the reader frequently lost his place or stumbled through some passage unproved.

The guest's curiosity led to suspicion. He changed his plan of leaving immediately and, after the repast, expressed his desire to rest for a night before resuming his journey.

The abbot scarcely heeded Bertram's lengthy remarks of appreciation upon the treasures and curios of the monastery.

"May I inquire," the young man asked directly, "how it is that you have here a remarkably fine *mehari* saddle?"

"Saddle, my son, saddle?"

"Yes, a gazelle-skin saddle of the type used on the fast racing *mehari* breed of camels in the African desert."

The abbot started.

"Hah! the old camel-saddle? What do you know of such things?" He leaned forward suspiciously.

"Father, my question came first.

Is there any reason why it should not be answered? If so, we can dismiss the whole subject."

"No, no, but—something has occurred, my son—your inquiry seemed to bear obliquely on the difficulty—I wondered—"

"Yes?"

"In a word, I beg of you to answer me. We might be of—of mutual help to each other," the monk added cautiously, suggestively.

Bertram shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not always been a resident merchant, father. I have spent a year and more in the Barbary States on the fringe of the Sahara, learned a smattering of dialects, and the common knowledge of the use of common things."

"Curious!" reflected the other aloud.

He lapsed into profound abstraction, his eyes scrutinizing the Scot with a new purpose.

"My son," he said at length, "I am moved to put my trust in you. Follow me to my study and I will tell you a strange tale."

The abbot led the way and summoned the provost to attend.

"Some fifteen years ago one of our brethren was sent on a mission to southern Sicily. Winds drove the vessel from her port to the coast of Tunisia. Several of the sailors and Brother Andrea landed on the desolate shore and found a lonely cell wherein dwelt one the Arabs termed a Marabout—pious and learned. Two lads, sons of desert chiefs, were studying false doctrines under this deluded Mohammedan.

"Brother Andrea determined to do his utmost to save at least one of those lost souls. He befriended the younger boy, a youth of twelve or thirteen, and on the plea of being taught to ride the lad's camel got Antar—for so was the lad called—to guide him several miles along the shore. They rested in the heat.

"Brother Andrea felt himself bound

to snatch this youthful brand from hell. Several sailors came. Antar awoke and, suspicious and terrified, fled to his camel and tried to mount. He would not loose his hold of the saddle, and, fearing the angry beast, the sailors cut the saddle-thongs and flung the whole thing with the boy into the boat that lay waiting.

"The young heathen was converted, and, having an astonishing knowledge of the old tongues—Hellenistic Greek and the mixed Arabic of the Tuareg tribe—he has been of much use in our midst. That answers your question, my son, as to how the big, red saddle came to Monte Zaldino."

"It does," agreed Bertram with a lack of approval.

"As you may have heard, our monastery is rich in treasures donated by the devout—books, vestments of cloth of gold, sacred vessels, and precious stones, and, recently discovered in a hidden recess, a strong-box about as big as a man could well carry beneath the arm."

"It contained—" burst in the provost.

"The pearl of price that would ransom a kingdom," continued the abbot firmly. "The treasure is gone. Antar has fled, taking it with him."

"Antar the Tuareg?" echoed Del Colpo, who had begun to look for a different ending.

"Even so. We had good hopes of taking him, but have just learned that he has escaped from Naples in some bark bound for the Barbary coast."

"A great misfortune!" inserted the guest.

"Now," exclaimed the abbot forcefully, "I have not told you this to spread the story of our loss through the provinces. I have a proposal to make. Help us to recover the steel box."

"I?" ejaculated his listener.

"You," affirmed the abbot with decision. "You are familiar with Antar's country. We will defray your expenses. The best horses shall gallop

you south. Pay any sum within reason for a boat to take you direct to Tunisia. Brother Luca—so we christened Antar—has no money; he cannot hasten his passage. You can reach Tunisia first."

"*Dio mio!*" cried Bertram, "but the man will have bartered his goods before sailing probably."

"I tell you no," thundered the abbot. "The box was secured in such a manner that a smith must struggle no little time to force it open. Antar had no key. He had no moment between his escape and sailing to force the box open."

"Had he done so we were lost indeed! He will not dare to shatter it on the crowded vessel. No! No! He will make for his old home in the desert. He will shun strangers' help at this task. He surmises the value of the treasure."

"That is all well and possible," agreed Bertram, "but, father, I am a busy man. There is no reason or inducement for me to accept this mission."

The abbot smiled cunningly. He waved his hand in deprecating denial.

"My son, your honest labor and success shall not fail of reward."

"How so?"

"One of the brothers informs me that that wild lad, your nephew—oh, most youthful and solicitous of uncles!—has been found lurking about the monastery."

The angry crimson flamed in the Scot's face.

"So you were—"

"Softly, my son, and hearken! If you undertake this mission, the lad shall be kindly kept and liberated on your return, whether you succeed or fail; but success will add this chalice"—he unlocked a black oak cabinet and held up a beautiful thing of gold set with precious stones—"to your reward."

"Take six months for the venture, or even more if you return with the box unbroken; but I fear that unless

Antar be overtaken before he reach his people in the desert, your journey will be useless. We are bound to trust you with more than you trust us."

"If you consider gems of more value than life."

Bertram looked squarely at the abbot. It was the abbot's turn to flush.

"I swear to you," he replied earnestly, "that I will keep faith."

"But should I die? Nay, the man must be free now, and then I will undertake your service with a whole heart."

Father Albertus was a good judge of character. He decided to yield the point. Fearing at first that Rizzo was implicated in Antar's escape, he had decided to keep him secretly at the monastery.

Then, that very morning, following Bertram's assertions as to relationship, came the definite news that Antar had succeeded in escaping the country. Small use in further holding Rizzo as decoy or accomplice. His crime was dwarfed by this possible reparation. He should be freed.

His conditions fulfilled, Bertram undertook the pursuit of Antar.

On board the little vessel that bore him to Susa—white-walled, white-roofed until it seemed from the sea like a smooth, white pebble on the shore—Bertram made a rough plan of campaign.

He decided to risk the whole game on one move and push on south to the Oasis of Ghadames and there wait for the runaway monk.

He reasoned that Antar might land within a mile or a hundred miles of Susa, but that if, as was most probable, he were making direct for Agades, he would join one of the south-going caravans, and nearly all of these, between Algiers on the west and Tripoli on the east, converged upon Ghadames. There Bertram could be sure of purchasing a staunch racing *mehari* that could cover, at need, one hundred miles in the long day—quite

a different beast to the servile *djemel*, the camel of burden that knew no such speed or endurance.

The Scot took unto himself for comfort and secrecy the garb of the desert. The turban, woolen burnoose and the cloth that the Tuaregs wear across the face to shield them from the wind-borne sands served as excellent disguise. He could not attempt, in conversation, to pass himself for a native; for, though he had picked up no little knowledge of the dialects, he could not speak with fluency.

Once arrived at Ghadames, Bertram began to arrange his campaign. He pitched his *gourbi* in a secluded spot near one of the *oueds*, or streams, that are forked from the central spring through the oasis to irrigate as much of the land as possible.

He attended the markets and roamed among the goatskin tents of the Arabs who came and went in the caravans, made up of pilgrims to Mecca or of traders with their hundreds of camels bearing burdens of ivory, salt, dates, ostrich feathers, gold-dust, gums, and slaves.

Bertram bought himself a sturdy *mehari* about twelve years old, in the prime of its existence, a huge, fawn-colored camel with clean, muscular limbs; he also purchased saddle-bags of coarsely woven camel's-hair and a high-prowed red saddle whose front pitched up like a slender, roughly shaped ape of diamonds.

He took part in the impromptu camel-races and became expert in guiding his *mehari*, native fashion, with bare toes, his legs crossed on the brute's neck, and to bring it from full speed to a sudden stop by a pull on the reins that passed through a single ring in the camel's nostril.

Bertram, by kindness and bribes, gathered as allies some score of young Arabs, whose duty it was to meet each entering caravan and gossip with the traders. In this way did the Scot expect to learn of Antar's coming.

And every night Bertram filled full

his *mezad*—the skin water-bottle that keeps pure and cool its contents for the salvation of desert-riders. In the oasis itself Bertram might fail to secure the steel box of jewels, but he would be ready to follow to the Tuareg capital of Asben—to Agades itself, at need.

This adventure suited Bertram's dreamy mood of melancholy.

The woman he loved was unattainable—the widow of a duke ten years older than himself!—but under night skies of the desert, where the tent of heaven was riddled with the fire of stars, it was joy unabashed to dream of Leila, to match her name to the sighing of the palm-trees and the bustling murmur of the *oued* as it tumbled coolly over the rocks.

Then, one evening, came Abulfeda and Rames, two of the most dependable scouts, and reported that a Tuareg, with strange tales to tell of a foreign land, was journeying to his home—that by some decree of Allah he had encountered there at Ghadames two of his own brothers, from whom he had been rudely separated as a child.

Then Bertram knew that the moment to act had arrived.

"*An-cha-Allah*—if God wills—he shall be relieved of his ill-gotten goods!" cried Abulfeda excitedly.

"He carries with him an oblong box rolled in an empty *mezad*. He does not leave it. When he comes to the *oued* at dawn, then may he go and—*An-cha-Allah*—leave the box behind!" Rames added.

These men were Berbers, between whom and the Tuaregs small love was lost.

"Be it so!" said Bertram with intense satisfaction. "Do not let this man out of your sight. If he leave the box in his *gourbi*, we can rob him. If he bring it to the *oued*, we must fall upon him and strip him of his stolen booty. For you all the reward shall be in accordance with your good faith."

The Scot well knew that once he gained possession of the treasure of Monte Zaldino, he would be in as much

danger from his allies as Antar was at that moment. But it was wiser to simulate perfect confidence at this stage of the enterprise.

At dawn, when the knifelike air had slashed the east until it bled behind the palms, Bertram waited restlessly at the door of his goatskin *gourbi*. The *mehari* was saddled and had been watered. The *mesad* was full. Then appeared Abulfeda, running.

"He comes! He comes — bearing the box!"

"If he lay it down on the bank, do you attack him, while I seize the treasure. The reward is here." Bertram dandled a clinking pouch. "I shall throw it to you, Abulfeda; and remember that you have sworn by the Prophet to be a faithful steward!"

There was no time for more.

Antar came striding, silent, lithe, and powerful, to the *oued*. On the steep bank of the stream he looked cautiously about him. There was a bulge in his white burnoose.

Then the man resolutely strode out on some stepping-stones to where the current swirled, swift and pure. He was about to fill his *mesad*. He stooped.

Bertram leaped out noiselessly on the shaky stones.

"Brother Luca, the good Father Albertus sends for the jewels of the monastery. Deliver them up in peace, and in peace may you depart."

The Tuareg flung about, half crouching. To look into his face, one would never have dreamed that he had yielded to alien training since childhood.

This man with the blazing eyes, the fierce expression augmented by the heavy lips and broad nostrils, had shed every vestige of superficial civilization. In his strength and alarm, he was primitive, magnificent.

In the fraction of a moment he had taken in the situation, and without apparent effort was upon Bertram with a swiftness and ferocity as natural as unpremeditated. The box fell in the

shallows, and the men were locked together in cool-eyed grapple, floundering a little, seeming slow at first in their straining postures.

Then Rames and the others leaped toward the *oued*. Bertram heard the noise of their onrush, but—they did not arrive.

He knew there was a struggle taking place on the shore, just as he knew he had at last found the grip to bear down Antar into the water, to hold him there till he lost consciousness.

Now there was grunting on the bank, the sound of a fall. The Scot strained desperately to dislodge the one firm foothold of his foe, whose fierce, proud glance was growing vague. Had Antar not been weakened by years of fasting and lack of exercise, the Scot could not have coped with him successfully.

"At last!" gasped Bertram as his adversary's knee gave suddenly, but the suddenness of the collapse was Bertram's undoing.

The forward movement carried his foot into a hole; he reeled, relaxing his grip.

Antar twitched sidewise, and, clutching crazily, the Scot slipped and fell with a mighty splash. He struck on a stone that blurred consciousness.

The cold water revived him, and he struggled dizzily to his knees in the shallows. Dawn was not yet white. There was no sign of any one living; there seemed to be a huddle of something on the shore.

Bertram half remembered, and began to grope blindly about near the spot where Antar had dropped the box. The Scot's left shoulder hurt him sharply. He put up his right hand. He had been stabbed.

Antar had doubtless sought hastily to finish him and fled. There was no use seeking for the box in the *oued*.

Bertram waded heavily to the shore and gazed curiously at the stained, lumpish burnouses. Then some one called in low tones. He looked up. There was Abulfeda.

"Allah be praised, you still live! The dog of a Tuareg has escaped. He stayed to fill his *mezad* and pack his *gourbi* on a second *mehari*. Also the box! He is but now gone."

"Gone? And the others? What happened?"

"The others were the man's brothers—may the vultures clean their bones, for they slew Rames! They are not gone."

"Ah!"

"Doubtless they reasoned if any attempted to follow, they would accompany the caravan, not knowing the way. They did not look for you to come to life again! It would be the part of the twain to see that such pursuers did not long pursue."

The Scot's jaw set in dogged lines.

"I shall not wait for the caravan. Antar fears nothing for the moment. I can overtake him, keep him in sight, follow his track if he leave the way. I will win yet."

"*An-cha-Allah!*" exclaimed Abulfeda in grave admiration. "And the others cannot well overtake you if they learn of your departure, because they are now using Antar's *djemels*, having given him their two *mehara*."

"Good!" cried Bertram. "Help me to mount. Here is reward for your latter service—and see to those poor fellows. Peace be upon you!"

"Peace be upon you," answered Abulfeda, as the *mehari* rose in sections. "Yonder is the way. Keep on the outskirts of the oasis. There are likely to be spies lurking about the *fonduk*. Peace be upon you!"

"I will give the inn a wide berth," muttered Del Colpo and brought his rhinoceros-hide whip down smartly upon his beast's flank. They were off like a sweeping, tawny shadow over the sands.

Bertram's intuition had not erred.

Before noon, hot on the track of the two *mehara*, he caught sight of Antar—a restless speck on the immense horizon. And he was sure that Antar had seen him and knew him for the enemy, be-

cause he swept off at a tangent from the caravan route.

Antar, confident of his own inherent ability and early training, intended to shake off the pursuer in the pathless desert, tire him in a long race, and leave him to the hyenas.

Bertram understood, but followed. His personal sympathy lay with this wronged Tuareg, but he had his oath to fulfil, and, with head throbbing, shoulder aching, he persevered in the face of death.

So the two men circled and rode many days, nearly always within sight of the other.

At little oases they would replenish their store of water, and, if possible, of dates; then, sometimes minutes, sometimes hours in the lead, Antar would swerve out again over the sands.

This test was to him, Bertram supposed, perhaps a matter of pride. The Scot admitted to himself his thankfulness that Antar's early desert training had been blunted by years at Monte Zaldino. Burned almost black as the sun, grown lean to a hard mass of weary muscle, chilled in the insidious cold of Saharan nights, it was all Bertram could do to keep the trail of this half-civilized Tuareg.

After several weeks of this killing pastime it seemed to Bertram that Antar was aiming for some large oasis. They passed other travelers and the bleached bones of camels fallen on the march.

The Scot was full of apprehension. In a big oasis, without allies, it would be so easy for Antar to give him the slip.

What Bertram had dreaded occurred. The Tuareg arrived at Ghat only an hour or so ahead of his pursuers, but the oasis veiled every sign of him.

In spite of exhaustion, the Scot ventured to make inquiries of all Tuareg children that he saw, asking them about a man newly come from the desert, riding one and leading another



*mehari*. None answered him to any purpose.

Wearily he arrived before the *fonduk*, or inn, keeping his face-cloth well up to his sunburned eyes.

The keeper of the *fonduk* was talking with a fine-looking Tuareg. Bertram followed them, with others, into the building and sat down to eat his boiled beans and dates, smarting with weariness and disappointment.

"The dog must stay to rest his *mehari*, to seek news—several hours ahead—" Bertram caught snatches of the conversation. "Directly to Agades—camping off the main route—but—"

Talking, the two men turned and walked slowly toward Bertram, and the Scot started within the thick folds of his burnoose, for he recognized a tawdry brass chain that Rames had worn.

The Tuareg noted the hollow-eyed stranger, and bent a pair of keen eyes on the seated figure. He, too, started, the least bit in the world, but he passed out after meeting Bertram's calm glance.

"He knows me, but does not know that I know him. He must be Antar's brother," reflected Del Colpo.

He bent his head in thought, then smiled to himself.

Del Colpo rose and strode from the *fonduk*.

The Tuareg was still idling near by. The Scot approached him.

"Peace be upon you! I seek a man of your tribe," he began in the most halting, misspoken Arabic imaginable. "I came from the monastery where he once lived. I fled away, because it seemed to me he had the true faith. I heard he had come to Ghat, but I do not find him. He is called Antar. Can you help me?"

The Tuareg's scrutiny probed in vain to find anything but a lucky accident in this encounter that confirmed his suspicions. He pondered and decided warily.

"*Salam aalikoum!*" He gave the salutation that guaranteed brother-

hood and bloodlessness. "The father of Antar has gone west to Teleg with the traders. When this was known to Antar, straightway he rose and took his way, even this dawn, again toward Ghadames to overtake the caravan from Chad."

Bertram gave expression to well-simulated gratitude.

"I shall follow and overtake him by night," he cried eagerly.

"You will overtake him—*an-cha-Allah*," admitted the Tuareg with hidden meaning.

Bertram tarried but long enough to water his faithful comrade, purchase provisions and fill his *mezad*. Then he rode north, grudging the necessary miles to shield his real knowledge from the Tuareg.

Bertram's act in going to him for information had convinced Antar's brother that he had heard nothing of the discussion of Antar's plans—or at any rate had not understood. Still he followed the stranger discreetly for a score of miles, till he was convinced of the genuineness of the man's intention to ride north.

But at last Bertram and his *mehari* wheeled wide on the billowy Sahara and rode south with all the speed and endurance that remained in their travel-worn bodies.

There was moonlight. On and on paced the courageous camel. They came abreast of Ghat; they passed it and pressed on in a wide détour till Bertram judged they must be twenty miles south of the oasis. Then they swung in and found the track of the lately passed caravan from Chad.

South they thudded. Not once did they pause for sleep or rest. Bertram ate and drank on his ship of the desert. It was well for the *mehari* that it could travel days without water, that its muscles were like hard, rounded rubber.

All day they went on and through the second moonlight. Bertram calculated that he would overtake Antar that night or at dawn. He rode now

in broad serpentines from right to left as he advanced, crossing and recrossing the trail, and suddenly, as they paced, the *mehari* pulled up short at the head of a steep, wind-blown cliff of sand.

Below was pitched a little *gourbi*, and two hunched camels were tethered near. This was the goal.

Bertram circled the drop and, fastening his camel, crawled to the flap of the *gourbi*. He looked in.

There sat Antar—asleep! He had been reading from some scattered parchments, confident of having eluded his persistent foe, and the steel box lay still unopened, intact, beside him.

With a triumphant, nerve-wrung shriek, Bertram pounced on the box. His dagger was at Antar's throat when the Tuareg started awake.

"Brother Luca" took in the realization of defeat and smiled a smile of stoic resignation.

"It is the will of Allah!" is all he said.

Bertram acted immediately. He searched the tent, the floor of sand, and Antar for any hidden jewels, then bound. Antar's hands and strapped him with the saddle-straps onto the *djemel* outside; evidently Antar had given up one of the *mehara* to his brother.

With cut strips of the *gourbi* he hobbled the *djemel* to prevent its rapid motion, and thrusting the parchments and remaining food into Antar's saddle-bags, prepared to leave.

"Peace be upon you!" he said with vague regret, but Antar's reply was merely an inscrutable smile—was it of reluctant admiration?—of ironic submission?

Leading the Tuareg's *mehari* and bearing the jewel of Monte Zaldino, Bertram rode north.

Early in June, 1773, Abbot Albertus was summoned from his cot one night by an excited brother. Nor was the abbot less excited when he learned who had arrived.

Bertram, gaunt and sunburned almost beyond recognition, gave into the Benedictine's hands, in exchange for the golden chalice, a box.

The abbot, with an exclamation of delight, fumbled his fingers over the delicate engraving on the lid. There was a sudden click and the whole side fell open.

Father Albertus shook the box over the table, while the monks clustered round in indecorous eagerness.

The box was quite empty. It fell from the abbot's grasp with a crash. He turned wildly upon Bertram.

"Who found the secret of the spring? The box does not unlock. None—none knew the intricate method, for I alone held the directions! The manuscript has gone!"

"But," cried Bertram, amazed, "he could not have had the jewels, for I searched every inch—"

"Jewels!" cried the abbot in a great voice. Then he checked himself and bade the others begone, all but the provost.

He turned on his superior.

"It was your counsel not to tell him all. Sir, the treasure of Monte Zaldino was an uncial manuscript, comprising the four Gospels, thirteen Epistles of Paul, one of John, and one of Peter, written in Hellenistic Greek during the first or second century of our era.

"It must have been walled up for safe-keeping during the invasion of the Saracens. We had no record of it. It was found recently by the merest chance. And now this most valuable manuscript in the whole world is lost to us forever!"

"Manuscript!" blurted out the Scot, aghast. "Parchments—manuscript! *Dio mio!* You should have trusted me!" He turned with angry accusation upon the monks. "Had you done so, your treasure were here to-day."

"How? How?" muttered the abbot, with twitching lips.

"I came upon Antar asleep in his

tent—over a manuscript! Whether chance disclosed the secret of the box or whether he had stolen that knowledge ere he stole the treasure, he must have known it, and had *I* known you were not seeking jewels—”

The abbot wrung his hands.

“I never dreamed he could work

the catch. I feared if you knew the utmost value of those irreplaceable documents, temptation might cause you to betray us and—”

“And the blame be upon your own head,” Bertram told him sternly.

“I wonder,” he added reminiscently, “if Antar is still smiling?”



# An Ancient Grudge

by William Tillinghast Eldridge

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST.

**T**HE man stopped with the suddenness of one who had been struck.

His eyes put an unuttered question. In frowning silence he gazed about him. Up and down the quiet village street his regard traveled.

Then his hand went to his cheek. He brought it away. Gazed at it; frowned. His arm dropped to his side.

“What in tarnation’s the matter with you, Hank?” queried a fellow villager just emerging from the post-office.

Hank Bowner turned slowly upon his questioner.

His lips parted. With an obvious effort he attempted a reply. But no words passed his lips. They were merely distorted in the semblance of a

smile, which changed to a grin of diabolical hatred and made his face terrifyingly repulsive.

Hanson gave back.

“What in tarnation—” His words were cut short.

With a wild lunge, Bowner made at him, uttering a shriek that brought the post-office gathering out upon the street.

Like a man gone suddenly mad, Bowner plunged toward the group. Shrieking as he charged, he struck right and left, and only the rapidity with which the crowd sought shelter saved it from the sudden fury of his onslaught.

Up the steps of the post-office he lunged. Across the boards he went, down the other side, and there he halted.

Swaying, mouthing words, reeling like a drunken man, he stared about him. Again his hand went to his

cheek. Again it came down and he looked at it. Again his arm dropped to his side with apathy.

For a moment he was passive, in strange contrast to the wildness of his assault upon his fellow friends and neighbors.

A face or two peeked out from the post-office windows. Up the street, where a few had sought shelter in wild flight, a head peered from around the corner of a building.

One to the other questions flew.

Hank Bowner had never been known to drink. Moreover, but a moment ago he had received his mail, and before its distribution chatted commonplaces with the usual evening gathering at the post-office.

Now he stood alone in the village street, a quivering mass and as wild of eye as a drunken brute or madman.

Why such a swift change? Why the assault upon them?

In low-voiced whispers the questions flew from one to another.

Then Hanson, the first to question the meaning of Bowner's strange actions, walked out toward his neighbor.

"Say, Hank, what in the deuce's got you? Trying to be funny? Well, yer look as if yer were a good imitation of a crazy man, you do. Cut it out and come on home."

With a tolerant smile he eyed his friend, but he was conscious of the truth that there was something in Bowner's actions which seemed to preclude the possibility of the affair being jocular.

"Say," he urged again, "if you've got 'em—say so. What in tarnation ails you, Hank?"

The quiver which suddenly shook the man brought forth the last question with a sharpness that hinted at his friend's alarm.

Bowner had begun to shake. Like a man with the palsy, he stood there in the middle of the street and every inch of his massive frame was convulsed by horrible jerks and quivers.

His arms twitched, his hands lifted and fell. One foot came up with a sharp jerk of the knee, then struck the earth with almost enough force to make the onlookers believe they had felt the jar.

The next second Bowner began to jump. In tremendous leaps he cleared the ground, and each time that he struck the earth it seemed that his rebound was greater.

Men and women poured forth from the post-office, their curiosity overcoming the fear they had felt a moment ago.

For a second Hanson viewed these strange actions, and then he sprang forward. He was of no mean proportions and his strength, matched many a time with Bowner, hardly less than his neighbor's.

Yet, when he attempted to seize his friend, he was flung aside as if little more than a feather.

He went reeling back, lost his balance, and crashed to the ground with a thud that all but stunned him.

Getting to his feet, he gazed blankly upon his friend for one moment.

Bowner had stopped his wild leaps. Now his mouth opened and it seemed as if he attempted speech. But only rumbles, mouthed gutturals, passed his lips.

His gaze turned to right and left. For a second he studied the group upon the post-office steps and the crowd gave back as if they feared again his mad attack.

But the man did not move. As wild as had been his actions of a moment before now he was passive. Into his eyes came the look of a wounded deer.

Piteous entreaty, a yearning, pleading light showed in his gaze.

Hanson shrugged and went toward him.

"Say, Hank, will you cut it out and talk? What in the dickens has got into yer? Be yer sick or—"

Again wild contortions of muscle and limb attacked the man. He leaped high into the air. His mouth flew

open, and while no sound escaped his lips his jaws parted and his throat muscles strained as if he had given utterance to a cry, the blood-curdling shock of which was almost felt by those who watched.

He struck the earth, crouched, and without a second's warning plunged straight toward Hanson.

With a wild cry the attacked man went down into the dust of the road, his assailant on top. Over and over they rolled, each fighting madly.

Suddenly Hanson was down and two hands gripped his throat. With a madness that was fiendish his head was lifted and battered again and again upon the earth.

Then others awoke to the horror of the situation.

With a cry half a dozen men dashed for the struggling two and fell upon Bowner. By the very weight of their numbers he was dragged to his feet, but with him came Hanson. The grip of the tightening fingers had not been broken.

"Let go of him!"

"Stop, Hank; stop!"

"Quit you fool, you're killin' him. Quit!"

The cries seemed to have no effect.

With wild fury blows fell upon Bowner and at last his fingers were wrenched from Hanson's throat.

As his grip broke he stepped back, still to passiveness. Before him lay the victim of his attack, breathless, purple of face, choked almost to insensibility.

Men bent over Hanson and lifted him up. For a second he breathed deeply. Then he shook off the restraining hands and stepped forward.

"What's the matter with you, Hank Bowner?" he roared.

He had lost all thought of the strange actions which had forerun his manhandling.

"Don't, Bill," urged the postmaster, appealingly. "Something's the matter with him. Can't yer see?"

The group turned. Up went

Bowner's hand to his cheek. He took it away, looked at it, and his arm dropped to his side.

The action turned the attention of the men to Bowner's face. Across his right cheek they noted a dull purplish tinge of color growing. With startling rapidity it grew and at the same time his face puffed and bloated. Huge blotches came on the flesh, bubbled like water blisters and burst to come again.

"What's the matter with him?" whispered one.

A buggy drew up at the side of the road and a little, gray man poked his head out from behind the dilapidated top.

Without a look for the huddled, staring men his slits of eyes peered long and earnestly at Bowner. Slowly his fingers strayed through his unkempt white beard.

"Something's wrong with him, Mr. Marker," volunteered the postmaster.

The man in the buggy stared as if fascinated by the horrible sight.

And horrible it was. Bowner's face was swelling with a rapidity that would have been grotesque had it not been diabolical.

It changed from purple to fiery red. In spots it puffed and the strained flesh broke with a little whiff of escaping air.

Slowly the man's right eye closed. Even as the cringing men watched, the features seemed blotted out, transformed, until he was no more like himself than the most hideous caricature.

As this went on Bowner stood swaying slowly. His mouth worked, his throat strained, and while no sound came from his parting lips it was as if he uttered the whine of an injured beast.

Then once more he began to twitch. For a second his arms lifted, jerked up and down, and his knees snapped.

He took one leap and the crowd broke.

The man, unheeding of the cries, charged up the road. Head down he

ran as if the very fury of his flight brought relief.

## CHAPTER II.

### THROUGH THE WINDOW.

STANLEY considered his friend with a quizzical light in his shrewd, gray eyes.

"Not such an unprofitable matter, this coming to the country for your health," he smiled.

The merest suggestion of embarrassment touched Naughton's face. Then he laughed good-naturedly.

"No use trying to fool you, Ed," he admitted. "Well, yes and no," he added thoughtfully.

Dr. Stanley smiled at the serious attitude of his friend. The time had come when he no longer worried over Naughton's condition of health.

Three months in Melton had done wonders for the young lawyer who had broken under the strain of a rapidly built legal practise.

As it was only a question of the condition of Naughton's heart—not as it might be weak from a physical standpoint—he felt permitted to show amusement.

"Well, hang it, Ed!" growled Sam Naughton; "it's not such a funny situation as you think. I can't make head nor tail of the matter. Yes"—with a sudden burst of frankness which he had not shown before—"I care for Grace Marker, and you know it. Whether she more than likes me is one of the things I can't make out. It's troubling, that—and you'd see it, you old bear, if you weren't married and loved."

"Perhaps I can appreciate being married," still quizzically.

"Well, that isn't all," pursued Naughton.

"Then what?"

"Her living there with her grandfather. Man, it's out of all reason. You know perfectly well that she is not—not like the rest of these people."

"Reflections on the countryside."

"Lord—no! But they are just plain country people, and you've got to admit that. She's different. The girl's been well educated, traveled the world over, and to think of her buried alive in this place—"

"Here, here," protested the doctor good-naturedly, "remember I'm buried alive in this selfsame place."

"You know perfectly well what I mean," insisted Naughton, determined to free his mind of its troubles. "You are here from choice and because your practise has been established. You are not caged in a dilapidated old house, unoccupied for years, and with a grandfather seventy-odd who is, to put it mildly, a queer stick."

"She's seen a good deal of you, Sam."

Naughton got up with a shrug, lighted his cigarette, and walked to the French window. Through the glass he peered out upon the doctor's well-kept garden.

Suddenly he turned, and his tanned face was touched with a smile.

"I'd punch your blooming head if I didn't realize that you always have been prone to levity," he growled.

"I've saved people's lives by being jocular."

"State of mind," nodded Naughton. "I dare say it works in many a case. Speaking of state of mind," and he came back to the table, "what do you suppose Grace Marker's state of mind can be?"

"You've seen a little of her, and you know that her place is not here in this village. She has had every advantage, and now she is cut off from all congenial companionship—don't run in that stuff about me—and made a prisoner to the whims of an old man."

Stanley nodded agreement.

"I get your point," he admitted.

"Yes, it is a queer situation. I was as surprised as the village when the old Marker place was opened, and Gale Marker and his granddaughter



came to live here. Let's see, it's close to fifty years since the Markers left—if gossip keeps dates in order."

"The man might have a yearning for the old place right enough," frowned Naughton, "and want to come home to die. But to bring her," and he shook his head.

"Take her away," smiled the doctor.

"Easier said than done. Ed, I believe she cares for me, and yet she keeps me at arm's length. As for her grandfather, well one sees precious little of him and gets less out of him, save grunts and mouthings, when they do. I can't comprehend the affair."

"Back to the first riddle and I can't answer it for you," replied the doctor. "I tell you, Sam, the best thing for you to do is to have a relapse and stay on for a while longer. You've made progress. Another month may win out for you. I'll get the wife to try again to get Miss Marker here for dinner and the evening, quite often."

"She refused your wife's invitations."

"With one exception."

"And that evening. Do you remember how ill at ease she seemed. As if she wanted to get away."

"Something like that. You spoke about it afterward, but truth to tell I fancy it was mostly your imagination."

"Well she hasn't come again. Up there she stays watching over her grandfather as if she dared not let him out of her sight. What's the reason?"

"Oh you're magnifying. Her grandfather's not such a bad stick as you make him out. He's old, and age must be tolerated. Yet," and the physician's sharp eyes grew very merry, as they could, "if you think things are so bad just carry her off."

"But she won't be carried. We are past the days when we can copy after the Romans."

"My dear fellow there is one thing that you must do when you are in love."

This with a great show of seriousness which did not deceive Naughton.

"Joke Number Two-million-five-

hundred-thousand," he grunted. "Go ahead."

"Use force. Not physical but be masterful. Batter down obstacles, drive home the will of yourself and make her see that you care in a way that will brook no refusal. A woman likes to be told what she must do by the man she loves, at least before she is married. Don't mention that last to Ethel. Go it on this line for a while longer and look for results."

"Easy to talk," mocked Naughton, "and easy for a happily married man to give advice."

"Oh you are ungrateful," protested Stanley, ramming home the tobacco in his pipe. "I try to help you and you simply scoff at my counsel. You're a good lawyer—not. You give advice and expect to have it followed. Take your own medicine."

"Here you've been under my care, came a broken-down wreck close to nervous prostration, and look at yourself now. Same old Sam who made records on the track and football-team at college. Big, brown, muscles like iron again. And handsome."

The doctor chuckled.

"You should see the advantages of the country life. The city nearly did for you and the country has put you back into shape. Now you want to take Miss Marker away from the environments that have done so much for you."

"Fine—fine," chaffed Naughton. "I'd have been in my grave if I'd had the environments surrounding her. That grandfather of hers, I tell you, is enough to give any one the creeps. He slides about that old house and grounds like the shadow of death."

"To see him out in the yard with his wire cage over his face and the heavy gloves on his hands playing with his butterflies is enough to make any one think he'd gone crazy. I don't know but what he has."

"You are about as prejudiced against Marker as one man could be against another. You couldn't think him agree-

able if he was the prince of good fellows just because he doesn't take his granddaughter dancing round through your world. If he moved down to the city and let you call for tea each afternoon he'd be glorious and your legal business would go to pot. You only saw him once in that rig."

"And that was enough. There he was out among the trees and bushes that have overgrown the old garden. Helmeted like a bee-man he was letting his butterflies or moths out of a big box."

Stanley tugged at his mustache and his sharp regard of his friend argued for a greater interest in the story than his scoffing tone indicated.

"You said he whistled them back?"

"Called them, or so it seemed, and they came. To be truthful, I didn't pay much attention to him and— How could I when I saw her? There she was crouching behind a bush watching, and if ever fright, terror, wild fear was written upon a girl's face it was upon hers. I never dared ask her the meaning of the incident."

Stanley drew a deep breath and shook himself into an amused attitude.

"Rot. Ten to one the old man has reached his dotage. Those butterflies are his hobby. Been collecting them for years; pets. You told me Miss Marker said they had lived in South America for a long time?"

"South America, Europe, Africa, all over the world, I fancy. I've batted round a good deal, especially on that big game hunt after college, and she's been where I've never been."

Stanley nodded.

"There you have it. Marker's a collector and she doesn't like the bugs, really has a dread of them. I've seen the same thing many a time. Some are born with it, a natural fear of certain animals. It's undoubtedly so with Miss Marker. You'll find the grandfather's an entomologist, and she simply can't bring herself to tolerate his collection."

"I dare say," nodded Naughton; "but that doesn't help."

"Not in the least. It—"

The quick ears of the physician caught the rush of feet on the gravel drive and he was round the table instantly.

Many a time a quick call had come for him. Like most country doctors his practise took him miles over the roads to all four points of the compass from the little New Hampshire village.

He straightened to listen.

On came the racing feet, up the treads of the porch steps, and, without a second's pause, round the house.

The next second the rush was upon them and there came a crash.

Straight through the French window, carrying glass and frame with him, plunged a man.

He struck the table and it went over with a crash.

As the window was driven in both men had sprung back.

As the table went down and the writhing, twitching figure upon the rug shook and jerked, Stanley sprang forward.

Hardly had his grip touched the man than he was flung back and across the room by the simple swing of the writhing arm.

With a cry both he and Naughton sprang forward.

Together they flung the man to the rug and by their combined weight held him there.

In his struggles he was turned face upward and a cry of horror broke from both men's lips.

In startled question they looked down upon features with hardly the semblance of humanity left.

The right cheek was bloated to thrice its normal size. Both eyes were closed. The mouth was puffed and swollen beyond the possibility of being opened, and down and over the distorted and fiendishly horrible face ran streams of blood where the window glass had cut great gashes.

"A rope, quick," panted Stanley, throwing his knee into the man's chest.

Naughton sprang to obey. As his weight lifted, the writhing, twitching creature flung the doctor aside and the man was on his feet.

Like some hideous demon, less man than beast, he crouched in the middle of the room.

His long arms twitched and reached as if for something upon which to vent their strength.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A TELEPHONE CALL.

THE horror of that inhuman spectacle held Stanley and Naughton rigid for one long moment.

Both men were winded with their struggle to master the powerful farmer, who seemed possessed of a strength as abnormal as were his distorted features unnatural.

The doctor was the first to move. With a quick sign to Naughton to hold steady he slipped into his office.

For what seemed an interminable age the lawyer waited. His eyes were set upon the grotesque and terrible sight before him.

The man again suffered the sharp twitching attacks as he had in the village street. Knees jerked, arms snapped, and a terrible straining of the throat muscles told of the suffering he endured.

Suddenly he plunged straight ahead and, with a crash that rocked the building, went into the wall. It was plain that the swollen, distorted face made the man blind.

He reeled back from the contact, and Naughton leaped for him. The lawyer caught him in his powerful arms close to the knees and they went down, sending a light chair flying across the room.

"Hold him, hold him, Sam," begged Stanley, rushing into the room, hypodermic needle ready.

Stanley leaped toward the thrashing men.

Bowner, feeling the grip upon him, fought like a fiend.

His legs kicked and thrashed, breaking Naughton's hold. With clutching fingers he clawed the air, and a light table, falling under his grip, was flung across the room.

It struck the doctor a glancing blow as he plunged forward to drive the needle home. With a cry he reeled and leaped for the hypodermic, knocking it from his hand.

As he seized it up, Bowner was free. Again upon his feet he held command of the situation. Naughton had leaped to his feet, but at a sign from Stanley refrained from springing.

Slowly the doctor circled the helpless creature and cautiously crept upon him from the rear. As he would have driven the merciful needle home Bowner was seized by a sudden paroxysm.

As if shot from a catapult, he went charging across the room. This time the blind madness of his move took him straight toward the wrecked window. Through it he went, carrying what little was left of sash and frame and out and across the porch he lunged.

Blind as he was to his surroundings, he had no inkling of the veranda edge, and went down and over, to fall sprawling upon the lawn.

Before either of the two men could reach him he was up and away. After him dashed Stanley and Naughton.

Through the garden, over flowerbeds, and finally down across the lawn the flight took its course. Both the doctor and Naughton, as quick as they were, found themselves no match for the madly fleeing farmer.

In the dusk of the summer evening it was like the chase of some phantom less real than the distorted face of the man had appeared.

Into the orchard led the race, to end abruptly as Bowner plunged into a tree his sightless eyes failed to see.

Without a word he dropped. The

next second, blowing and panting, the two men were upon him. Stanley started to drive the needle home and withheld his hand.

"No need," he panted. "We can handle him without it. Get a rope!"

"At the house," snapped Naughton. "Use the needle, man; don't take a chance. He's superhuman in his strength."

"He's insensible. Get a rope. If he comes round, I'll quiet him."

Stanley dropped down upon the turf and set the needle-point upon the bare arm—to drive it home if the man moved.

On the run, Naughton turned and raced for the house.

Stanley never stirred save to allow his free hand to creep along Bowner's wrist for the pulse.

And what he felt, even before his finger had pressed upon the throbbing artery, but confirmed the leaping blood in the swollen throat.

Never had he felt such a pulse.

Never had he looked upon such a swollen and disfigured face. He thought of ivy-poisoning first, though the features were far more distorted than any case he had ever seen.

Yet he knew it was not ivy-poisoning in so far as the conditions had affected the man's actions.

Until now he had had no idea who the man was. But as he studied what little was left of human semblance about the face he began to suspect. The man lay passive, hardly breathing, the leaping blood in his neck alone telling that he lived.

Stanley took the chance to search his pockets, and there he found the letters Bowner had obtained at the post-office but a brief half-hour before.

His bewilderment increased.

Placid to the point of stolidness, Hank Bowner had been supreme among the villagers. What could have brought such an attack? What account for the horrible bloating of his features?

Naughton came racing with the rope and the heavy cords were made secure about the man's ankles.

"Not his hands," warned Stanley. "Those wrists are swelling. Pick him up."

With Bowner between them, they started for the house. Again and again they were forced to put him down as he slipped from their gripping fingers.

"Come," Naughton interposed at last, "put him on my back. It will be easier."

He knelt down and Stanley, dragging the body to an upright position, laid it across his friend's shoulders. In that way the balance of the journey was accomplished and the senseless man finally laid upon the couch in Stanley's office.

Naughton straightened and shook the cramp out of his shoulders.

"What is it, Ed? What in Heaven's name would change a man like that and drive him wild? Look," and there was repulsive terror in the voice as much as he strove to keep against it, "did you ever see such a face? Man, it's not human! It's simply one mass, one horrible, bloated, broken, and blistered mass of flesh. The features are gone."

The lawyer's voice rose tense, strained, unreal.

Stanley, down on his knees beside the couch, only shook his head. He had forced medicine between the swollen lips, and after several attempts succeeded in working the swollen throat until it was swallowed.

With fingers on pulse he waited. Naughton, as fascinated as he was by the very horror in the sight, turned away, sick in the pit of his stomach.

Stanley felt the same horror. Never had he had such a case, but his training saved him from giving any outward sign.

Pounding and thumping, as if no heart, no matter how strong, could stand the strain, the pulse leaped and throbbed.

Suddenly he fancied he caught a slight relief, only noticeable to his delicate fingers. He straightened and turned to Naughton, who was standing in the doorway looking out upon the wrecked living-room.

"I can't make it out, Sam," he whispered. "But you'd better telephone. Get the Franklin farm—it's next to Bowner's place—and ask them to—"

A cry like the shriek of a wounded moose rent the air.

Both men swung.

In one terrible convulsion Bowner had snapped the cords about his ankles. Before either man could make the fraction of a move he was on his feet.

His lunge carried him straight for the office door. He swept both men aside and went headlong into the living-room and lay perfectly still.

Stanley reached him first and turned him over.

"Telephone," he said, and his voice shook. "Telephone the Franklin farm and let them get word to Mrs. Bowner. Caution them. Don't let them tell her that he is dead."

"Dead?" whispered Naughton.

Stanley nodded and straightened.

And then he swung. Wild shouts were borne to their ears. With startled question they faced each other.

Was it coming again? Another inhuman thing.

The clamor grew, and suddenly, to their untold relief, they caught rational words.

"What's wrong? What's the matter there?" called the doctor, reaching the porch.

As the excited group came in through the gate he made out the rapidly flung questions.

"Yes," he answered as they halted in a body, "Bowner got here; he is here. Tell me what happened to him."

Before the crowd could make reply the sharp ring of the telephone turned the physician toward the hall.

With an unsteady hand the doctor picked up the receiver.

"Yes—this is Dr. Stanley," he agreed, striving to hold his voice even.

"Doctor—doctor," wailed a woman's voice. "Come, come quick. Jim's sick—it's terrible! Come!"

A quiver ran up Stanley's spine. As used as he was to alarming calls, he noted a terror in this summons which could hardly be accounted for by mere anxiety.

"Yes, Mrs. Morris; yes," he assured. "Just tell me, so I'll know what to bring, what are the symptoms?"

"Oh, he's terrible," came the moan. "His face is all swollen, and he can't talk. He acts just as if he was crazy. It's just now—he just came home. He won't know me, he won't speak. He—"

A crash, a woman's shriek, a dull thud, as if something heavy had gone down, came over the wire to the strained ears of the physician.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT THE MORRIS FARM.

INTO the dusk of the summer night drove Dr. Stanley.

Naughton he had left in charge of Bowner's body with strict orders to allow no one to come into the room.

"I don't like to do it, Sam," he had said, as he hesitated a moment on the porch steps. "I don't believe it's contagious, but I don't know. I don't know what it is," he ended hopelessly.

"Go on, go on," urged Naughton sharply, his nerves still a trifle unsteady. "If Jim Morris is like him," with a nod toward the office, "you are needed. Thank Heaven your wife is away for a few days."

Stanley swung into his buggy.

Then the hesitating crowd which had followed upon Bowner's wild flight pressed forward.

"What's happened to Hank, doctor?" demanded one.

"He—he is dead," answered the physician slowly. "I can do nothing for him and I have another call. I've got to get away."

"Another!"

As a body the pressing men gave back. Fear, horror, question flooded their faces.

"What is it?" came the sudden cry from Bill Hanson. "Another like Hank—and he's dead."

Stanley leaned down.

"Hanson, you'll have to see Mrs. Bowner. I don't know how long I'll be gone. I don't know whether this call is like Bowner's or not, but—here, come with me. I'll talk with you on the way.

"The rest of you better go home. Don't say anything about this matter, men. It won't do any good, it can't help, and it may do harm. We mustn't let the folks get excited," and the doctor gathered up his lines.

As he went whirling over the rutted road toward the village he plied Hanson with question upon question.

The information he was able to obtain only left him more than ever in a quandary.

The suddenness of the attack which had ended so swiftly in Bowner's death gave him no inkling of the nature of the illness.

He had not seen the farmer for some time, but Bill Hanson was positive that his late neighbor had been in the best of health.

"He ain't acted queer nor nothing, doctor," assured Hanson, his voice low and sober. "It come all of a sudden right out'er a clear sky. He and me was in thar getting our mail, and he walks out ahead of me. When I comes out thar he was in the middle of the road acting like I told you. What be it, what ailed him, Dr. Stanley?"

The question was put with a pitiful appeal that was strangely childlike. To the farmer—as to Stanley—there was something more than terrible in this sudden death and the ghastly, unnatural distortion of Bowner's features.

The horror of it rankled in the minds of both men with an appalling clearness, nerve shaking, blood chilling.

"I can't tell you what caused Bowner's death, Hanson," the doctor answered finally. "I have had no time to examine into the case and I admit it seemed to be out of the ordinary. You go to Mrs. Bowner.

"Here," stopping suddenly, "get down. I'm going up the hill road. Tell her that her husband is ill at my house. It will be best to put it that way. Don't let her go to him, tell her to wait until I get back. A sight of that face would send her into hysterics, as placid a woman as she is. I'll leave it to you. Do your best in the case."

The doctor touched his mare with the whip.

He had driven rapidly to this point, but now he sent his horse along at even a faster pace.

Uppermost in his mind was the question of what he would meet with at the Morris farm. He had tried to get the connection after it was broken so abruptly with that shriek and crash, but, failing, he spent little time over the attempt. If what he feared was true he only thought of the need for his presence, and so drove with all possible speed.

Many a race he had had with death, but this race seemed different, for his mind pictured a scene ahead filled with horror enough for a man, doubly more terrible if a woman was facing it alone.

Before him loomed the mountains and his eyes focused themselves upon a narrow valley at the base where the Morris farm lay.

What was he to find there? What perhaps had already happened?

Down a crossroad he swung his mare, taking the corner with a slue that nearly turned the light carriage over.

"Come on—come on," he urged, and the animal with head high, feeling perhaps the anxiety of her driver, quickened her pace.



Past one farmhouse after another he flashed, and at each he peered intently as if fearful that this horror which had come upon the quiet village with such suddenness might already be visited in more than one place.

This fear took a more sudden and definite form as a wild cry was borne to his ears. He slackened his mare's strides just the least and strained his ears.

Then he heard the shout again, and over a rising field he made out two figures.

In the dusk they were hardly discernible save as they breasted the rise.

One came up against the sky, ran along the high ground for a moment, and after this flying creature raced a second.

The doctor brought his sweating animal to a walk and stood up.

He saw the first of the two men go down over the hill and the second turn after him. Then both were lost in the darkness.

Quickly he sent the mare along and drew rein again at a turn in the road. There he stopped. Momentarily he thought it strange for him to do so when there was such urgent need for him on ahead.

But something in the attitude of that first racing figure awoke fear in his heart. He thought that here might be the object of his summons as he recalled the madness of Bowner's blind flight.

As he drew up he had heard a call. The next second there came a crashing sound. Out from the bush, beating, leaping, wildly flying—as if blind to his surroundings—plunged a boy.

The doctor pulled his mare back, swung, and, when he saw that he could not get out of the way, leaped for the ground, clearing the buggy-wheel.

With a crash the flying figure plunged head down into the wheel and there came the snap of wood.

Without a sound the boy went down a limp heap in the road.

Stanley was beside him. It was another, as horrible, as bloated, as distorted in face as had been Bowner. And like Bowner, the need of a physician was past.

Out of the woods came a second figure.

"Cutler," snapped the doctor, his voice sharp, "I can do nothing—nothing. It's inhuman to leave you, but up the road, at the Morris farm, there's another case like this. I've got to go. I've had one. Your boy is the second. I've got to get on."

He was back in his seat and had seized up the reins.

"But, doctor—doctor. What's the matter? Ed ain't dead. He can't be!"

"I'll be back. I'll stop at the house," shouted Stanley, and his whip came down across the mare's flank with a suddenness that sent the animal into the collar with one wild plunge.

Again the whip fell and the horse broke into a run, sending the light buggy swaying and pitching from one side to the other of the rutted road.

What his thoughts were Stanley hardly knew. His mind was racked with horror. Yet he strove for some explanation, out of his experiences, which would guide him in deciding how he could possibly stay the disease which had come upon the village with such startling swiftness.

He took the last turn on two wheels and drew the snorting animal to its haunches in the doorway of the Morris farm.

As he cleared the wheel and started on the run for the house the side-door flew open and a white-faced woman came rushing to meet him.

"Doctor—doctor, I thought you would never come. Jim—Jim—"

Her overwrought nerves gave way as she pitched forward.

Stanley caught her, spoke sharply to bring her to herself, and when he got no response save a low, pitiful moan, picked her up in his arms.

On the run he carried her into the house and laid her on the couch.

"Mrs. Morris," he urged, "listen. I am here and it is all right. Where's Jim?"

He shook a powder into a glass and put it to the woman's lips.

There was no question that she had gone through a terrifying experience.

She was shaking like a leaf, and great tears ran down her thin cheeks unheeded. To the doctor, though he had not seen her for some time, it appeared that her hair had whitened perceptibly.

"Please," he urged, "it is all right. Just tell me what happened. Where's Jim?"

She swallowed hard, tried to steady herself, and burst into tears. At last, with precious moments passing, Stanley succeeded in calming her slightly.

"He come home," she moaned, "and walked in. He acted funny. His face was all swollen and he didn't seem to know what—what he was doing. Then he got worse and he—he—"

A stumbling crash at the door broke the woman's halting tale. With one wild shriek she flung herself upon Stanley.

Down the narrow hall came shuffling, stumbling footsteps.

The next second the sitting-room door flew open.

Upon the threshold stood a young fellow. His face was bloated. His eyes half closed—his mouth a swollen caricature of itself.

Peering, blinking, he looked about him. Slowly he raised the shotgun he carried in his hands.

## CHAPTER V.

### ANOTHER CALL.

As fast as Bill Hanson and Dr. Stanley had driven down the road the news of what had befallen Hank Bowner sped before.

Hanson met Mrs. Bowner as he plodded across the fields, following the short cut to the farm.

When the woman made him out in the dusk she came racing forward with a glad cry. But all the relief vanished from her voice the instant that she saw that it was not her husband who plodded toward her.

"Bill, what is it—what's happened to Hank?" begged the wife, seizing her neighbor by the arm.

Hanson, utterly inadequate to the situation, attempted subterfuge and failed. Quick questions, a look at the man's frightened face, and Mrs. Bowner guessed the awful truth.

"Where is he—where's Hank?" she cried.

"He—he— Dr. Stanley says for you—"

But she did not wait for the halting words. Taking it for granted that her husband was at the doctor's—with the mention of Stanley's name—she went racing across the field, leaving Hanson no choice but to follow her.

Along the road and through the village they went, walking wildly, the woman pouring forth question upon question as best her spent breath would permit.

Before the post-office a group of excited villagers were gathered. Their voices dropped to a sudden hush as the white-faced, bareheaded woman came up the road.

"Is he here?" she cried, hardly pausing.

Some one came running to her as an inaudible answer was made. The woman threw her arms about Mrs. Bowner's neck.

"It's awful, Mary. I didn't see him, but Tom says he was terrible."

Mrs. Bowner threw aside the restraining hands and turned. Then Davis, the postmaster, mustered his courage and interposed.

In the end he succeeded in persuading Mrs. Bowner to go in to his wife while he agreed to hurry to the doctor's house for news concerning the afflicted ones.

With head down, realizing how futile—save to gain time—was his

mission, Davis started for the physician's cottage.

As he stepped in through the shattered French window he heard Naughton at the telephone.

The call had just come, and the lawyer, fearing he hardly knew what, had sprung to answer.

When he recognized Grace Marker's voice it seemed as if every ounce of blood left his heart.

"Dr. Stanley—I want Dr. Stanley," she begged.

"It's Sam—Sam Naughton—Miss Marker. Is there something I can do?"

"Isn't Dr. Stanley there? My grandfather is ill. Ask Dr. Stanley to come at once."

"Mr. Marker ill?"

It hardly seemed to Naughton that he could speak. Then he got a grip on himself.

"Stanley is out. What is it? Is your grandfather poisoned? Is his face swollen, disfigured, bloated? Has he lost all control of himself?"

"What do you mean?"

He felt that he had made a mistake.

"I'll get Stanley. He's been called on a sudden case but I'll get him."

"Why did you ask those questions? What did you mean?"

"I—I wanted to know the symptoms—how your grandfather was—so I could tell Stanley. That—that was all."

"You spoke of poison. Why did you ask if grandfather was poisoned? You said something about his face. What did you mean?"

There was insistence in her tone. He realized that he must satisfy her.

"There have been two bad cases of poisoning or something of the kind. I wanted to know if Mr. Marker was suffering in the same way."

A pause followed so long that Naughton grew uneasy. At last he spoke and her answer came hesitatingly.

"Tell me just what you mean. Who has been poisoned? How did it happen? Tell me everything."

"A farmer, by the name of Bowner, and young Jim Morris."

"Jim Morris?"

"Yes," admitted Naughton, suddenly recalling that he had met Grace and young Morris driving a number of times.

"Tell me—tell me everything," she begged.

There seemed no way out of it and so he gave her the facts, but made the tale less horrible than it was in truth. He felt that the girl on the other end of the wire hung upon his words with a tenseness that was virtually transmitted to him in her silence.

"I'll get Stanley," he ended.

"There is no need. Don't."

The sharp return of the receiver to the hook broke the connection.

He was startled at the abruptness of her act. He turned at a sound in the next room.

"Mrs. Bowner is down to the post-office, Mr. Naughton," explained Davis, looking his helplessness.

Naughton hung up the receiver with a frown.

"And she wants to know about her husband. Of course. I'll—I'll see her. You stay here. Bowner is in there and the door is locked. Some one has got to stay, and I've got to get hold of Stanley."

"Another? Another one?" came the horrified question.

Davis's mouth went agape. His eyes grew big. He looked like a man about to have a stroke.

"I don't know," flung Naughton, and leaving the postmaster no choice but to obey or desert he raced for the stable.

Seizing up a saddle he flung it onto the doctor's second horse and swung upon the animal's back.

At the post-office he paused just long enough for a word with Mrs. Bowner and persuaded her to wait where she was until Stanley's return.

Then he was away, riding low, urging his galloping horse to its best speed.

One thing was impressed upon his

brain with startling vividness. There had been wild appeal in Grace Marker's voice as first she called for Stanley. To Naughton there could be no question but that her grandfather was ill, even if it was not the same sickness as had come to these others.

Her insistent questions he did not think strange. If Marker did suffer as had Bowner then naturally the girl would inquire so minutely. If her interest was beyond the ordinary in young Morris he felt he understood even better.

For what reason she should state that there was no need for Stanley's presence he failed to comprehend as he refused to obey.

One thing he did carry: a vivid picture of the girl he loved facing as terrible a situation as he and Stanley had just passed through. It made his blood run cold.

Out into the night went the steaming, galloping horse with Naughton riding low and calling words of encouragement.

As he neared the mountain he straightened in his stirrups and peered ahead. It was at this moment that there came, flung back by the rising hills, the dull roar of a shot from the direction of the farmhouse.

With a start Naughton let fall whip on flank and the snorting animal threw its head and leaped the faster.

That the shot had come from the house which was his destination he never for a moment doubted. And his imaging brain pictured even wilder things than he and Stanley had just gone through.

Tugging frantically at the bridle he turned his horse in at the farmyard and in a flash flung himself to the ground.

There before him stood the doctor's still steaming mare. One glance he shot at the animal and raced for the house.

From within came the sound of wild battle. A woman shrieked. Heavy blows fell. Again there came

the vibrating, thundering discharge of a gun.

Naughton tore the side door open and dashed down the hall.

"Get back, get back. Get out, Mrs. Morris; get out," came Stanley's shout.

Naughton flung the sitting-room door wide. Wreaths of smoke filled the room. The heavy odor of gunpowder stung his nostrils, and through the haze he failed to see distinctly what had happened.

Then a brighter flare sprang up and a woman's voice in mad terror broke the moment of silence.

"I can't put it out—I can't put it out," she wailed.

"Ed—Ed," shouted Naughton, leaping into the room.

Then he saw the doctor, astride a thrashing, fighting man, and in the quickening glare of the flaming curtains, Mrs. Morris striving ineffectually to drown the blazing oil of the overturned lamp.

"Get her out," shrieked Stanley. "My needle, over there—over there—give it to me!"

Naughton seized the woman and half flung, half carried her to the open air.

Dashing back he had the hypodermic. Thrusting it into Stanley's hands he flung himself across the thrashing legs.

The needle went home like a shot. "One second; wait; hold him," begged Stanley.

Naughton looked at his friend.

"Those shots?" he panted.

"He had a gun. No, no one hit. I may have one or two in my arm; it stings."

"Good Lord—another!" breathed Naughton, looking down.

Stanley's lips were grim as he set his knee the harder and again drove the needle deep.

Simultaneously the two men glanced at the licking flames.

"I've got him," breathed the doctor.

Naughton let go his hold and leaped for the curtains. He tore them down, stamped them under foot, and took one glance at the snapping wood-work.

With a wild dash he found the kitchen and a pail of water. It was utterly ineffectual.

"Get out," he panted. "Get out.

(To be continued.)


It's gone too far, Ed; I can do nothing."

Stanley was on his feet with a cry and a sign for the senseless young man.

They seized him up between them.

Fighting their way through the thickening smoke, they made for the hall.

# "Nothing Ever Happens" by Effie Ravenscroft



**T**HE new home stood on the edge of a cañon and it was five stern miles from the glittering city of Los Angeles.

A dozen years or so ago, this would have meant almost primitive conditions. But to-day it means electric lights and hardwood floors and modern bathrooms and trim, lippia-covered lawns, and about as many other comforts as man should have for the good of his body and the peace of his soul.

And so, three thousand miles away from home and friends, a continent's breadth from every familiar face save one, Rose McCleary hummed happily as she passed from room to room, arranging here and rearranging there, every deft touch a caress. For the craftsman bungalow was softly brown

and very beautiful and perfectly equipped though not large; and the roses that laughed in at the casement windows would never cease to bloom.

And all—all of this beautiful bit of California—was Rose's; and it was so far superior to anything that she had ever dreamed of having that homesickness—that composite cry of the spirit, the flesh and the devil—had not yet attacked her.

Prosperity and the doctor's blunt verdict, "Get out in the open and stay there or cash in, Jim," had come at one and the same time. So Jamie, as he was known to Rose, and Rose had hied themselves away to this land which, tradition hath it, is as a City of Refuge to the lame, the halt and the blind, broadly speaking.

Presently, Rose stopped to listen; then she went softly to the door and looked into the kitchen. Jamie was lying back upon a pile of excelsior beside a packing-box, and it was evident that he had fallen there under the stress of some emotion. Seeing Rose in the doorway, he extended toward her a crumpled paper bag.

"Three nutmegs, Rose!" he announced. "Three nutmegs three thousand miles? You aimed not to leave anything behind, didn't you, little girl?"

Rose chose to take his remark seriously.

"Not a single thing, I believe!" she triumphantly declared. "And considering that it was my first experience at moving and that I did all the packing, I think I'm a wonderful young woman. Nothing missing and nothing broken and clear across the continent, too!"

Jamie looked leisurely and in detail at the debris surrounding him. Jamie was not well and Jamie was tired and Jamie was a man and not used to too close contact with the sterner realities of domesticity.

"You are a wonderful young woman, Rose," he agreed. "But after many weary days I have about come to the conclusion that the game isn't worth the candle. Bringing the household stuff was a confounded expense and a more confounded trouble. And therefore we should have done as we were advised—sold out and bought new stuff here."

If Jamie were looking for excitement—as a chuckle, quickly smothered, indicated might be the case—he was not disappointed. Rose flared up like dynamite in contact with a fuse.

"To be sure we should," she agreed. "And we might have got a cat here and left Billy Whiskers behind. Bringing him was a confounded expense and a more confounded anxiety. We could have got a pedigreed Angora, no doubt, which would have been more in keeping with our new estate. But would it have been better or just as good or the

same thing at all? Now would it, James Adair McCleary? Look at that and then answer me!"

She pointed into the living-room, to the luminous-eyed creature that, purring blissfully before the glowing brick fire, seemed to give the touch that meant "home"; and to the simple souls of the McClearys "home" was synonymous with paradise.

"Would any other cat have been the same to you as the one that was a wretched, half-drowned, famished, castaway kitten? Would any other cat look upon you as the beginning and end of all things, as that one does?" Rose concluded.

Now this blow struck home, as she knew it must. For Billy Whiskers was Jamie's own "find" and protégé and pupil, and was considered by the said Jamie to be the most extraordinary specimen of feline extant—which, perhaps, he may have been. Who knows?

"No, Rose, it wouldn't," Jamie gracefully acknowledged.

"Well, nothing that we have could be replaced so far as I am concerned," Rose declared. "Every single thing represents a something that can never be repeated."

Rose's soft chin quivered; for she was at last on the verge of realizing the solemnity of those three thousand separating miles.

Jamie, alarmed, nodded understandingly; for Jamie thoroughly understood indeed. Rose was actuated by no spirit of petty miserliness. Her household holdings were to her not inanimate things but living entities, breathing of dear memories. For Rose was the composite expression of a staid English father and a temperamental and beautiful Irish mother who could see where others were blind and had believed to her dying day in "the little people."

The next morning Jamie sauntered in from a delightful two-hours' feeding of the quails from the arroyo to find that the expected had happened. Rose was a picture of desolation.



"Jamie, we left the mottoes!" she exclaimed tearfully. "They're absolutely not here! I've been through everything."

"The mottoes? What mottoes? What are mottoes, anyway?" Jamie remarked, somewhat dazed by this sudden transition from California sunshine to Cimmerian gloom.

Rose looked at him in amazed reproach.

"The three mottoes that hung right at the dining-room door," she replied. "I can't imagine how I happened to leave them!"

Jamie meditated for a moment.

"For the life of me I can't remember those mottoes, Rose," he confessed. "Were they very valuable?"

"As you value things—no," Rose replied. "Nothing that we had back there was very valuable. I bought them at a sale for ten cents apiece. But I bought them when ten cents meant more to us than a hundred dollars means now and when every little touch that I could manage meant doing away with the bare look."

"And I looked at them every day for years and they cheered me through many a blue moment; and they exactly expressed my views of life as I myself couldn't possibly express them. And I'm going to have them back. I'm going to write for them this very afternoon. No, I won't write, either; I'll telegraph."

Jamie groaned.

"Three ten-cent mottoes three thousand miles away! Don't do it, Rosie!" he implored. "It would look so foolish, you know! Besides, this is November the eighth and we've been here more than a month and your mottoes have gone past recovery long ago. You can bet our little old house hasn't been locked up since we left. Old Tom Ross hasn't got enough get-up to lock up anything."

"The first tramp that ambled by there and tried the door got your mottoes, dear little girl, and exchanged 'em at the first saloon for something of

more practical value to him. But don't you worry! You just describe 'em to me and I'll take the next car and bring you back three that'll be just the same."

"Just the same"—will you hear him!" Rose exclaimed, aghast. "One was 'The Simple Life,' in script under a cluster of clover blossoms; and another was 'Progress' and the script was under a bunch of Black-Eyed Susans; and the third"—and here Rose clasped her hands—"showed a dear little cottage with a big tree on a country road, and it was called 'the House by the Side of the Road.' And don't you dare to bring those mottoes into this bungalow, James McCleary!"

Jamie had a brilliant idea—one that he knew would appeal to the mystical side of Irish Rose.

"I'll tell you what, Rose," he commenced, "you brought the valueless nutmegs and left the valuable—to you—mottoes, didn't you? Out of all our possessions, large and small, those mottoes are the only missing things. Well, 'nothing ever happens,' my dear. You take it from your Jamie, there was some mighty good reason for your leaving those mottoes when you brought even the nutmegs."

A quick breath from Rose and a sudden dilating of her pupils told him that he had made an impression. But she looked at him suspiciously and then shook her head.

"Nevertheless," she said. "I'm going to telegraph for them. Not this afternoon, though. I'm too busy. Tomorrow."

But on the morrow Rose came downstairs with a strange expression in her luminous eyes.

"Jamie," she faltered, "like Joseph I have dreamed a dream. In it I saw a young woman. I saw her as plainly as I see you, James. I should know her anywhere. She was beautiful and oh, so beautifully dressed! But her face looked hard, Jamie, as if she were in some awful trouble; and somehow I got the impression that it wasn't her real face that I saw but a mask.

"And Jamie, she was going down the road towards our little old house! And I saw a flash of lightning in a mist; and she looked up at the sky and began to hurry. And she ran down to our gate and up to the house; and I saw her try the door and it opened, Jamie. It was unlocked, just as you said. And she went inside.

"And then for a while there was just a mist and nothing at all in it; but it was heavy as if it were disturbed by a storm. But after a while it cleared and the woman came out of the house with something in her hand. And she stood on the porch and looked all round. Then she went down and touched the late blossoms on the bush that grew by the gate.

"And then she raised her face and looked up at the sky and seemed to be saying something—a prayer, it seemed. And all the hardness was gone out of her face and it was—oh!—so tender and beautiful, Jamie! It looked like—well, like I imagine it would look if she had seen a vision.

"She went out the gate and turned to latch it; and it was hard to latch and took both hands, as—as it always did, you remember. And she laid on the post what she had in her hand, while she fixed the gate. And I saw it quite plainly; it was 'the House by the Side of the Road'—one of the mottoes we forgot.

"And when she had fixed the gate, she stood looking at the house and garden, and with such a smile! Then she picked up my motto as if it were something that she must be very careful of; and she went down the road as if she were going to do something important and was in a great hurry. And then—well, I wakened, Jamie, and heard you talking to Billy Whiskers."

She stopped and looked at him pleadingly; and again Jamie understood his Irish Rose.

"I'm going out," he announced, "to telegraph. Have breakfast ready when I come back."

The next afternoon, Jamie answered

an imperative ring and received a communication from "old Tom Ross."

Am sending two mottoes by parcel-post. Third one gone off hook. Found handkerchief on floor. Sending it, too. Seems valuable. Good luck, old scout!

"I was right," Jamie said quietly. "Nothing ever happens."

"You were right," Rose agreed softly.

And then they sat and looked into the fire and said nothing.

Back in Rose McCleary's home city, three thousand miles away across the continent, another woman had sat and looked into a fire and said nothing.

She, too, was a Rose, strange to say—a beautiful, hot-house Rose, slender and patrician, white-skinned, blue-veined, and of generations of the idle-born. But this one was known as Rosamond, as she and her mother and her mother's mother had been christened; and somehow not even her most intimate friends would have thought of calling her otherwise.

Only Bob Tarkington had ever looked upon her as "Rose." He had called her that during their brief engagement and for a few months after their marriage. Then he had forsworn the habit; and if Rosamond had been cognizant of the happening she had made no sign to that effect.

Doubtless, Rosamond Tarkington would have been surprised had she ever caught herself thinking of herself as "Rose"; for Mrs. Tarkington had strange moments of perplexity when she acknowledged that she and herself were really not on intimate terms.

She stared into the fire and then frowned into the fire. And then she swept from a table at her elbow a calendar in a gold frame of wonderful filigree and stared and frowned into that.

"November the eighth!" she murmured. "And I've not heard from Bob since the first, and then only a line—as usual. I should be anxious if I cared. But I do not care. And it is

good not to care. One is free then, and young—and—happy. I cared for a whole year; but for these three years I have not cared. Sometimes I wonder what has happened—I wonder but never know!"

She did not turn her head at a knock on the door; and with equal indifference she took from the maid's tray the proffered envelope with the special delivery stamp, and quietly dismissed her.

"From Bob," she said, and opened it, still with that lack of interest that among her acquaintances passed for poise, but which Rosamond knew by its correct name.

A minute later she suddenly threw out both hands in an apparent effort to push something back, and with eyes black with fear and horror crouched further and further back into her chair.

Presently she laughed. No, she did not exactly laugh, either. Rather she emitted a sound that started as a laugh and ended in a scream, quickly stifled. She staggered up from the chair that had declined to receive her further into its enshrouding depths, swayed for a second or two and, triumphantly regaining her equilibrium, swept across the room, pushed aside the door's costly draperies and stood before the pier-glass in her dressing-room.

The image of highly cultivated beauty therein reflected she surveyed with a smile that began and ended on her white lips. Then she swept it a mocking salute.

"Behold Rosamond Tarkington—pauper and wife of a convict and common thief!" she said. "Impressive, is she not? Doesn't look the part at all!"

With that scorching, all-seeing glance, she swept the priceless equipment of that room, of the bath, of the other room beyond.

"Gone!" she said with awful calm. "All gone, he says! His money, my money, the—ah, God!—the money that he held in trust. Squandered, wasted by Robert Tarkington! And Bob Tarkington is therefore just a common thief on a big scale."

She dropped her face into her hands, but it was only a moment before she raised it again; even so, it looked almost normal, for Rosamond's long training served her in good stead even now. Then she rang for her maid.

"My car in half an hour," she said. "I shall not need you, Lucille."

Alone, she consigned the letter to the flames and with burning eyes watched its swift consumption.

"He'll be here at two," she reflected, "and I—well, I shall be out. Why should I 'talk it over' with him? What is there to say? Certainly he would not care to hear what I might say! To-day, only he and I know, he says. In a few days more the whole world will know—through the merciful agency of the press, he suggests.

"I wonder why he is coming home at all! Coming home has long ceased to be a habit with him. Did he dream that I could save him—or that I would—if I could? I shall let the law take its course and then divorce him.

"That is what the world will expect me to do; and have not I and mine always met the expectations of the world? If I cared, it might be different. I would forgive him and give an exhibition of touching fidelity through an erring husband's long prison term. But I do not care! Why should I?"

An hour later, Rosamond's chauffeur, speeding toward the park under orders, suddenly brought the car to a halt at summons from its interior.

"Drop me at the next corner, Maurice," said Mrs. Tarkington, "and then take the car home."

Alone on the designated corner, Rosamond watched Maurice until he was but a spot in the distance. Then she boarded the next car, after assuring herself by its sign that it was bound for Elk Grove.

From the whirling chaos of her mind she had abstracted one fact: it was necessary for her to think. But how was she, who had never had to think on unpleasant things, to think now? Ah, she had it!

Once, as a child, she had for a very short period owned an odd and practical creature for a nurse. And this practical creature could think for herself and had strange views of life; and she had sometimes—for the good of Rosamond's soul, she had told the child—put her charge into that vehicle of the people, the street-car, and so transported her out into the country.

And on that long, silent ride amid a crowd of silent people, and afterward in the quiet cottage of the nurse's busy relatives, Rosamond had made first acquaintance with the process known as thinking; and so she had found that attached to her there seemed to be another mysterious creature who would have liked things startlingly different from the things Rosamond liked and would have got infinitely more out of life.

Rosamond's car swept noisily on, out into a section of the city's outskirts that was to Rosamond but a faint memory, for no fit automobile roads were these. And presently—after what interval she did not know until later—she saw a road.

Because the road was quiet and still, green and houseless apparently, and peaceful, and in all things a contrast to herself, Rosamond signaled the conductor and made her exit from the car.

Down the road she started, her hands tightly clenched, trying to think and not thinking, trying to comprehend and not comprehending, praying unconsciously for the ability to break a nightmare.

Why had Bob wanted to come to her at all? Some men would have killed themselves and so done the decent thing. Even justice would deal gently with the dead. But Bob Tarkington hadn't even that sort of cowardly greatness in him. Bob hadn't anything in him that she had supposed was there—she had known that for years.

A spattering of rain—and Mrs. Tarkington came suddenly to a realization of her surroundings. She glanced wildly down at her raiment and then wildly round. Down the road at some

distance one lonely roof spoke of possible shelter.

A few minutes later she arrived, panting, in front of the house, to find, by a sprouted hedge and a "for rent" sign, that it was empty. The gate opened in answer to frantic efforts that split her gloves, and she fled to the shelter of a too-open porch.

At a vivid and unseasonable flash of lightning, she shrank against the door, involuntarily putting her hand upon the knob.

To her amazement it unprotestingly turned. Now Rosamond Tarkington was desperately afraid of empty houses on lonely roads and she was desperately afraid of death and she was desperately afraid of storms as possible instruments of death. But of these evils the first was the least; so she pushed the door softly open and passed within.

When she had passed within and closed the door, and so shut out the world, a strange thing befell her. Her terror of what was without and what might be within suddenly vanished.

She felt a peace, a security—as if, in this lonely and shabby little house by the side of the road, she had found not temporary shelter but sanctuary and journey's end. In the dusk—with a hand before her but marvelously unafraid—she went surely down a brief hall into a room beyond. Pausing a second to get her bearings, she groped toward a window, opened it easily, pushed ajar one of the outside shutters, and then reclosed the window against the storm.

Curiously she looked about her. At first there was seemingly nothing to see save emptiness, the dreariness of dust where obviously dust had rarely been, bespeaking a careful presence gone. But presently a smile glimmered through the white tragedy of Rosamond's face.

"Why, the poor soul left something behind—a treasure, doubtless!" she exclaimed; and she crossed the room to where three mottoes, rimmed in wood-green, hung upon the door-frame.

There were three mottos there, but Rosamond Tarkington never knew it.

Idly and with the half-contemptuous smile lingering, she commenced to read, suddenly caught her breath and stepped back, as if smitten by an unseen hand.

Why should I sit in the scorner's seat,  
Or hurl the cynic's ban?

"Why? Why, indeed, Rosamond Tarkington?"

With a sobbing breath and dilated eyes, she leaned again to "the writing on the wall."

"Why, Bob! Bob, listen!" she exclaimed, wonderingly. And in a voice that would have struck Bob Tarkington as the voice of a lost ideal, she read:

"Let me live in my house by the side  
of the road,

Where the race of men go by—  
They are good, they are bad, they are

weak, they are strong,  
Wise, foolish—so am I.

Then why should I sit in the scorner's  
seat,

Or hurl the cynic's ban?  
Let me live in my house by the side

of the road  
And be a friend to man."

"'They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong, wise, foolish—so am I,' " she repeated; and again: "So am I, Bob."

I see from my house by the side of  
the road,

By the side of the highway of life,  
The men who press with the ardor of  
hope,

The men who are faint with strife;  
But I turn not away from their smiles  
nor their tears—

Both parts of an infinite plan—  
Let me live in my house by the side of  
the road

And be a friend to man.

Oh, Rose McCleary, could you but have seen!

But we forget—you did see, Rose, though you were three thousand miles away!

Rosamond Tarkington lifted in that humble house a transfigured face and

in the silence stretched out pleading hands.

"Why, Bob!" she exclaimed, and her voice rang unfalteringly. "That's it! You and I and a little house by the side of a road!

"You came back after the years and thought you married the little girl you remembered—the one you alone had called 'Rose.' And I thought I married the shy boy that the little girl had loved. And we both were seeking the one thing that had 'rung true.'

"But you never found the little girl in your wife, Bob, and I didn't find the boy in you. Rose could have found him, perhaps, but Rose was not there. The whirl and the pace and the false-ness had done their work, Bob, as—I know it now—they always must. And because I was disappointed, Bob, I sat in 'the scorner's seat' and hurled 'the cynic's ban' at your weaknesses and shortcomings—I who am as weak and as foolish as you!

"And you increased your pace until you quite lost your bearings, I guess, under the goad; because you have cared all along, Bob. I am seeing now. And now—now—"

Her clenched hands completed the ruin of her gloves.

"But hold tight, Bobby! Rosamond called you a thief and said she didn't care and she believed it all. But the little girl is coming as fast as she can! 'But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears,' " she concluded in an agonized whisper.

Gently she lifted the other Rose's ten-cent motto from its fastening and clasped it tightly to her breast, quite heedless of possible damage to the raiment that a few minutes before had been one of the concerns of her life.

Her glance did not inquire as to the state of the weather when she once more stood without. For the Rosamond of that moment had no memory of a storm. Her eyes bestowed a benediction upon the departed Rose's house, her garden, and lingered long upon the bush by the gate. Bending, she laid

reverent, caressing fingers upon its friendly yellow blossoms.

"Little bush and little house," she whispered, "I wish that you might be Bob's and mine. But we must go far away and so that cannot be. But I pray that in some way the soul who left her peace and her message with you and showed me the road that she has found good, may know—may know—"

She choked, and started on in frenzied haste.

Only after she had sat what seemed hours to her in a car which certainly crawled did she realize how far she had ridden.

"The little girl is coming, Bob—not the scornor but the little girl! Heaven send me a taxi!" was her mental cry as her eyes searched the road.

After an eternity, the car did come upon a taxi, empty and moving leisurely cityward. She signaled it from the window and at the next stopping-place alighted.

"Risk the limit!" she managed to articulate; and she put into the chauffeur's willing hand a bill at which she had not looked; subconsciously, she knew that it must be large enough to buy exceptional service, for all the money she had with her was of large denomination.

The driver looked at it, though, and instantly ceased to speculate about several things, among them the nature of the article she gripped so tightly and her reason for wearing upon her hands what appeared to be rags.

Rosamond let herself into the house silently, passed blindly a bewildered butler in the lower hall and a maid in the upper one, and finally entered again the domain of that morning. Just as she seemed to know all else, she knew she would find him there.

He started to his feet at the very slight sound of her entrance, turning to the door the face of a hunted, driven creature; simultaneously, one hand went to his hip pocket.

Rosamond saw, without seeing, both the face and the gesture. He stared un-

believingly at her, swayed for a moment, and then collapsed into a chair, as does the prisoner who, expecting condemnation, reads in the faces of the jury the verdict "not guilty."

With the gesture of a mother shielding her beloved, she gathered him to her.

"Turn your head just a minute," she whispered.

Unhesitatingly, he obeyed. She held "the House by the Side of the Road" within range of his eyes.

He read a few lines, reached up a shaking hand and grasped the motto and read on, and back, and on. At last he looked dumbly up into the beautiful eyes that smiled their answer down to him.

"We are going away to that," she said quite tranquilly. "Father will give me now what he would give me in his will and it will pay—will pay what you owe, Bobby. Father has much influence, perhaps nobody will know; but if they do, it will not matter much."

"We shall have paid; and we shall be far away, very poor and hard-working—and happy. Somehow, we were not meant for the hollow shams we were born to, Bobby—that has been the whole trouble."

"In some little house by the side of the road we shall find our real selves at last; and though we shall be poor in money, we shall be rich in love—the only wealth worth having."

Bob's answer was to turn his weary head back to its resting place; and when, after many minutes, his sobs had died away, Rose touched his pocket.

"Take it out," she whispered.

Without moving his head, he placed the shining weapon in her hand.

"If you had—had—" he faltered.

"But I did not, Bobby!" she interrupted. He was conscious only of the note in her voice. He did not see that in spite of its glorification her face was ashen, did not hear her whisper:

"If she had not left the message! Or if she had remembered and come back for it!"



# False Fortunes

By  
Frank Conly



## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

YOUNG WORTHINGTON, since childhood the recipient of an income from a never-seen half-uncle, Julian Bull, residing in Mercer, New Hampshire, suddenly is summoned to his uncle, who writes that Worthington's entire fortune has been dissipated in scientific research. With Morton, his attorney, Worthington goes to the old man, who, he finds, has discovered, among other things, a "primary element" called "Id," which—like the Philosopher's Stone—will transmute precious metals and into which all elements are transmutable. This discovery is being sought by enemies of the professor's, so the latter has surrounded himself with protective electricity *et cetera*. One enemy, Reave, puts Morton temporarily out of business.

Edith Deering, the professor's niece, with whom both Worthington and Morton have fallen in love, has a fortune which has not been touched by the old gentleman in his scientific researches. The old man dies suddenly, and Edith goes to Boston to stay with friends. Worthington and Morton search the house and laboratory for a will and for the single specimen of "Id." After vainly searching for a while, they decide to reconnoiter an old quarry back of the house, which lately has begun to be reworked, and where they have discovered Reave and companions have been laboring.

## CHAPTER XII.

### OUTWITTED.

**M**OVING cautiously in the uncertain light, it took us quite double the time to reach the spot from which I had obtained my first cursory view of the old quarry than it had occupied me by daylight. We waited there for a matter of five minutes, and then, as there was no sign of movement from the direction of the quarry, we ventured to advance right up to the workings, and soon found one of the crude fixed ladders by which the workmen climbed from

ledge to ledge, where the face of the granite was perpendicular.

Here Worthington assumed the lead and started climbing; but I was close at his heels. After the first ledge was reached there was a slope with rough footholds that had been purposely left in the rock; then another short ladder to the third ledge and another slope to the fourth.

The fourth ledge was considerably broader than any of the others, and was some thirty-five or forty feet from the base.

We were not looking for anything in particular. Indeed, if either of us

had been asked what we expected to discover, I doubt if there would have been any very definite reply forthcoming.

It was simply that the recent advent of workmen at the old quarry, when it had been abandoned for so many years, and the fact that I had seen Reaves there in company with the foreman, for reasons best known to themselves, had roused vague suspicions in our minds. We were there to see anything that was to be seen, and if our suspicions proved to be groundless—well, so much the better!

On the last ledge we stopped to listen. During our climb several loose stones had rolled from under our feet on the slopes, and, slithering to the edge, had dropped to the ledge immediately below, or farther, with an accompanying noise that must certainly have attracted the attention of any one within hearing. All was silent, however, and we began moving cautiously along the platform.

Where we were we were in darkness, for the moon's rays were cut off by the rock overhead and the ridge of pines. Presently there came an exclamation from Worthington, who was still in the lead.

"Why!" he cried. "We are already at the end of the ledge."

"Oh, no," I contradicted. "I am sure it extends right across the face. I saw it by daylight, you know."

"Well, feel for yourself," he suggested, moving to the inside.

I crept past him and, sure enough, encountered solid rock coming right out to within a foot of the outer edge. I puzzled over this for a moment.

"There's something fishy about this," I said at length. "It looks to me as if this strip had been cut out purposely to give the appearance of a continuous ledge from below; but there is a sort of buttress here, and the ledge continues after eight feet or so. I am sure of that, for I saw two men at work on the far side that day I was here."

"I vote we risk a light," said Worthington, and I heard him fumbling for the electric torch.

When he pressed the button both of us exclaimed in wonder, while Worthington promptly released it again, leaving us in darkness as before.

"Well, what do you make of that?" he queried, lowering his voice.

"A cave," said I.

"No," he answered positively, "a tunnel—drilled and blasted out artificially. Now I see the meaning of that buttress of rock. It was left as a screen to hide the opening from possible discovery from below."

For a time we were silent, each following his own thoughts, and again listening for any sign that would reveal the presence in the vicinity of any living thing other than ourselves. At last Worthington spoke.

"We've got to explore this," he said decisively.

Feeling our way on hands and knees, we crept into the tunnel-mouth. When we were well inside Worthington again pressed the button of his torch, and we examined the place. It was about six feet wide and considerably higher than that.

The two sides sloped together to form the roof, and from where we stood it was evident that to a certain extent I had been right in my first surmise. The opening was that of a natural cave, and the screen of rock outside was equally natural.

But the hand of man had hewn out the false ledge that helped in the deception, and had also been busy inside, widening and removing projections so as to give a clear passage.

We followed the fissure at a gentle downward incline for about twenty-five yards. The greater part of this distance we had made cautiously, for soon after we left the entrance a curious sound had come to our ears that we were at a loss to understand. When we did discover the cause we looked at each other in blank amazement.

At twenty-five yards, more or less,

from the cave-mouth the natural fissure ended; but there an air-compressor driven by gasoline had been set up, and a tunnel had been bored and blasted at a sharp angle from the direction of the original.

This artificial section was fully as long as the natural, and from the far end the sound of rock-drills came to our ears, driven by the compressed air, and occasionally the voices of men. A little farther we ventured, till we caught the dim glow of miners' lamps, and then we turned and retraced our steps to the open.

Back on the ledge, Worthington spoke with caution.

"There are perhaps half a dozen of them in there, and it would be foolhardy to tackle them by ourselves," he said. "One of us must ride to Mercer for help—the sheriff, I suppose."

"But," I exclaimed, "what can we do? I suppose they are quite within their rights; and what business is it of ours, anyway?"

"Don't you see?" he answered impatiently. "What do you suppose they are up to in there. Why do you suppose they went to the trouble of tunneling for granite—'for a railroad wharf'? And why in that particular direction?"

A light began to dawn for me.

"Good, Heavens!" I ejaculated, suddenly as excited as Worthington. "The shop!"

"Exactly," he snapped. "They are undermining the laboratory."

After that we did not stop to waste further words. This then was Rupert Reaves's work. The outside workers at the old quarry had been merely a blind to deceive a chance visitor attracted by curiosity or vague suspicion—as I had been—while the real work was being carried on day and night underground, and was nothing less daring than continuing a natural tunnel far enough and in such direction that it should eventually terminate beneath the laboratory of Julian Bull.

It was the refuse from this tunnel that the wagons had mainly hauled away, dumping them—we afterward discovered—on a piece of waste ground just out of sight of the north and south State road, a little over two miles away.

The intent of all this strenuous toil we could only surmise; but considering the cost involved, it began to look as if there were substantial foundation for the suspicions the professor had entertained as to the identity of those who employed Reaves.

From the ledge on which we now stood to the top of the low cliff was only a matter of twelve or fifteen feet, and, had it been scalable, it would have provided the most direct way back to the house and to the stable, which we were anxious to reach to saddle a horse.

But the top overhung, and so far as we could make out it was impossible. We had perforce, therefore, to return the way we had come.

The slopes were the more difficult to negotiate, as we had to feel for our foot and hand holds, and a descent of that nature is rather more precarious than the ascent. From the alternate ledges it was simply a matter of finding the ladders.

On the bottommost ladder, which was about ten feet, I went first. Three feet from the ground I missed a rung and found myself hanging from my hands. However, as I knew I was almost at the bottom, I simply let go and the next instant was struggling in the grasp of two powerful fellows, who evidently had been in wait for me.

I succeeded in shouting a warning to Worthington before a rough hand was forced over my mouth; but the warning was too late. The same accident that had befallen me befell my companion.

He, too, missed a step of the ladder—for the simple reason that the step was no longer there. The whole ladder had been sawed off about three

feet from the ground. Unsuspecting, we had fallen into a trap, and the trick our assailants had resorted to gave them all the advantage they required. Worthington had no chance to use his automatic any more than I had to bring my stick into play.

My friend was seized by two more husky workmen, and though both of us fought hard, it was useless. Two more men came to the help of the enemy, and our hands were speedily bound behind us. We were not gagged, for, considering the loneliness of the situation, to cry out would have been futile.

In the darkness it was impossible to distinguish the features of any of the attacking party, and so far they had wasted no breath in words. However, I had a shrewd suspicion that Reaves was there, and it was speedily confirmed as we were marched away from the shadow of the quarry, and into the moonlight.

Reaves walked just ahead, and he did not forbear to smile his satisfaction into our faces. In the pale, lunar light the scar on his cheek showed up white and ugly.

"I suppose you realize that this outrage is likely to cost you dear," said Worthington angrily.

"Shut up," snarled the spy, "or it may cost you dearer.

"What d'ye mean by poking round here, anyway?" he demanded. "It'd have served you both right if you'd met with a fatal accident—see?"

His words were comforting to this extent—evidently it was not his present intention to do us any particular harm. He was merely taking precautions to prevent our interference with his plans.

Reaves, I believe, had the theatrical instinct developed to a marked degree. The stage was set for a weirdly dramatic scene, and he was not sorry to have us as audience, knowing full well that we would appreciate the performance to the full, though we could hardly be expected to enjoy it.

We were escorted to a point about a hundred and fifty yards to the right of the old quarry, where the ground rose sufficiently to give us a view of the tunnel entrance and also the roof of the laboratory and part of the surrounding wall. The cave-mouth was in darkness, but we knew pretty well about where it lay.

There was no lack of stout rope, and we were each bound to a tree—not brutally, but effectively. Then our captors stood about us in expectant attitudes, their eyes fixed on the spot where we knew the entrance to the tunnel was.

It was all of twenty minutes before anything happened; then a light appeared on the upper ledge of the quarry; then another and another, till there were five in all—flaring head-lamps such as miners use—and their combined illumination served to show up the opening from which they had emerged.

One by one, and in some haste, the men carrying the lamps descended the rock face. Now the lights gave the impression of dancing fire-flies in mid air. When the first man reached the sawed ladder his curses came faintly to us; but he shouted a warning to his fellows, and they took the last ladder with caution.

One of our captors shouted to attract the newcomers, and they speedily collected on the point of vantage that Reaves had chosen. They glanced curiously at Worthington and me. Some grunted; others only shrugged. Then all turned eyes of uneasy anticipation toward the cave-mouth.

"Who's left?" Reaves demanded of one of the men.

"Wilson," he growled in reply.

"How long?" the spy demanded.

"Ten minutes clear," the man answered, and both lapsed into silence once more.

Another ten minutes lapsed slowly. At least, I suppose it was about that period, though the seconds dragged so that it appeared more like an hour

to me. The air was tense with suppressed excitement. I could feel my heart pounding, pounding, as I waited, and the only sound was that of the deep breathing of the men and my own.

"There he is." Some one broke the silence.

Another light had appeared at the cave-mouth, and the tension was momentarily broken, only to increase, however, as we saw the face of the last man to leave the tunnel. He threw himself face downward on the ledge, close to the wall of rock that rose above him. A hundred seconds or so ticked away, then—

Never, so long as I live, shall I forget that scene.

The thunder of an explosion that seemed as if it must have torn the very earth asunder echoed and reechoed about us. The ground on which we stood trembled, while smoke and flame leaped upward from the spot where the laboratory had been.

After the terrific outburst of sound there was silence for a space of seconds, then came the rattle of debris falling on the rocks on every-side, and the men ducked instinctively. Rocks, boulders, fragments of machinery, fell close at hand; but no one was hit.

I can only surmise at the quantity of explosive Reaves had employed, but I speedily realized that he had made a thorough job of the task he had set himself to accomplish. I doubted if any vestige of Julian Bull's expensive plant could remain after that cataclysm.

As soon as they recovered from the momentary stupor into which they had been thrown the men about us began to move back toward the old quarry. I heard them call Wilson again and again, but there came no answering call; nor had there been any sign of his light since the nerve-shattering upheaval. Presently one of the workmen came running back and addressed Reaves.

"Wilson's done for," he cried

hoarsely. "A chunk of rock as big as a house was loosened away by the vibration, I reck'n, an' he's bin crushed to a pulp."

"How long'll it take to get him out?" Reaves demanded impatiently.

"He's only under one corner," the man answered. "We might git 'im out in half an hour."

"Well, get busy," the spy ordered. "We've gotta clear out of this as soon's possible."

He went off with the workmen and left Worthington and me still bound to our respective trees. We watched the lamps as the men worked to extricate what remained of their comrade. Occasionally we glimpsed their faces, but it was impossible to read the expressions thereon at that distance.

After a while they descended once more to the lower level, and in a compact mass moved toward the wagon-track, bearing the lifeless form among them. Finally their lamps were extinguished, and we saw them no more.

Till that moment neither of us had spoken. The drama we had witnessed was so strange and fascinating that it had held us silent. At last, however, I found my voice.

"That, then, is the end of a lifetime of labor, of self-denial and sacrifice for an idea!" I said. "What now of the 'Universal Solvent' and of Id—the greatest scientific discovery of any age?"

"Looks as if Reaves meant to leave us here for keeps," Worthington remarked irrelevantly.

"I dare say we'll be able to attract attention from some one passing on the road to-morrow," I responded cheerfully; "but we're going to have an uncomfortable night of it."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### TIMELY RELEASE.

FOR almost two hours we remained helpless. Our utmost efforts to free

ourselves proved unavailing. Satisfied that we could do nothing but wait patiently, we ceased our struggles, which had only resulted in making the rope bite into our wrists, causing exquisite torture. I had broken the skin, and every time I moved the rope rubbing on the raw flesh was like a branding-iron, and, though he only swore softly, Worthington was in no better plight.

Hope revived suddenly when we saw the light of a lantern moving slowly toward the old quarry from the direction of the wagon-track, and we became aware of two figures. We were in no haste to call out, however, for we realized that Reaves might have returned with one of his henchmen, in which case a plea for help would have met no response other than, perhaps, derision.

But when the two figures stopped uncertainly and the one with the lantern held it in such wise that we could make out their outlines, they were unmistakable. I would have cried out in glad recognition had not Worthington uttered a timely warning.

"Not too loud," he whispered. "You might scare them out of their wits—or Martha, at least."

Then he called her name—old John being deaf, as has already been recorded.

"Hello, Martha!" he called cheerily. "This way, please!"

Martha started violently and clutched her husband's arm, and they clung together in pathetic helplessness.

"It's all right," Worthington added reassuringly. "There's nobody to hurt. Only Mr. Morton and me. I need your help."

"Yes, yes, Master Frank," she responded, her voice quavering and reaching our ears but faintly.

"I'll be right there, Master Frank," came the shriller tones of the old man, whom Martha had apprised of our presence.

It took them some time to cover the eighty-odd yards that separated us, for the ground was rocky and un-

even and there were bushes and boulders to obstruct their approach. Besides, the slope was quite considerable for limbs whose joints were somewhat stiffened by the "rheumatiz."

Worthington kept encouraging and guiding them with his voice; and I, too, occasionally spoke, just to let them know that both of us were safe, for, though I came a very poor second to "Master Frank" in their regard, they had come to like me well enough.

At last they were beside us, puffing from their exertions and showing traces of the terrible scare they must have experienced when the explosion occurred.

"Land sakes, Master Frank!" exclaimed the old dame when she recovered her breath.

"You'll find a pocket-knife in my waistcoat—right-hand pocket," said Worthington, and with fingers that shook from eagerness she obeyed his suggestion.

Meanwhile, the old man had recovered his voice.

"That's right, Matty," he cried shrilly. "I'll hold the lantern."

Between them they managed to free Worthington, and he in turn, but more expeditiously, performed a like service for me; and mightily glad we both were to stretch our limbs and chafe our wrists tenderly.

We thanked our deliverers warmly, shaking them by the hand and patting their shoulders till they recovered a measure of their normal cheerfulness; then, helping them over the rough ground to the wagon-track, and leading them at a gentle pace along the State road, and finally home.

They were eager to talk, but this Worthington would not permit till all four of us were comfortably seated in the library, where there was a considerable breeze, due to the fact that almost every window in the house had been shattered, and only the stout wooden shutters prevented what would



have been a miniature gale had they been lacking.

Martha insisted on preparing a hot cordial, of which Worthington had to compel the old couple to partake. Then, with our wounds washed clean and bandaged, with a soothing ointment next to the skin, which Martha assured us she had prepared with her own hands, we announced that we were ready to listen to their story.

All told, it amounted to the fact that old John, coming from the stable, had seen two strangers lurking about the laboratory building and decided to report it to Worthington. He entered the house, only to learn from Martha that we had gone to the shop.

Not considering the matter pressing, seeing that he had become used to "them spies hangin' round," as he expressed it, he decided to await our return. When we returned to the house he did know it till we had gone again, and he saw us go down the drive and over the slope toward the old quarry.

He had called after us, but we had not heard. An hour or so passed; then had come the explosion.

"We thought the end of the world had surely come, Master Frank," said Martha. "Even John Foster heard it, an' everybody knows he's as deaf's a door. An' the way the house shook; an' the windows—well, you see for yourselves what happened to most o' them."

After half an hour of prayerful panic, when the two of them had clung desperately to each other, they had recovered their wits and begun discussing what had actually happened. They soon decided that it was the shop that had blown up, and at first were inclined to blame some of "Master Julian's fool contraptions."

A view of the sight where the laboratory had stood confirmed their judgment. Great gaps had been torn in the outer wall. The shop itself, to all intents, had been blown from the face of the earth. The arc-lights had

failed, of course, and every globe was shattered to powder, though some of the uprights still stood. But the light of the moon was sufficient to give a fair idea of the havoc that had been wrought.

The house, too, had been plunged in darkness when the dynamos went skyward; but Martha, who never had got altogether reconciled to "them modern novations," had a goodly supply of candles laid away in a cupboard against the day when "lectricity" should be shown up as the fraud and sham she had always secretly known it to be.

We had already discovered that Reaves had taken steps to cover the escape of himself and his gang of workmen, over and above leaving us bound and helpless. At least we supposed that he was responsible for the fact that when Worthington attempted to telephone to Mercer with a view to getting into touch with the sheriff and the police, it was only to discover that the instrument was useless.

Either the wire had been cut, or else it had been broken by some falling rock after the explosion. We fully realized that the men had had ample time to catch the last train running on the branch line that night, and that already they were a good two hours' journey away.

Worthington was anxious to bring the criminals to book, and would have saddled one of the horses and ridden to the town right away; but I dissuaded him.

"Wait till morning," I suggested. "If you go with a complaint to the sheriff there will be a lot of men nosing round here before we have a chance to go over the ground ourselves."

"You think—" he began, after a pause to consider this view.

"I think it is just possible there may be things of value to be picked up. There's a chance, for instance, that the Universal Solvent itself may have escaped annihilation."

"Do you realize," he objected, "that there must at least have been about a thousand pounds of dynamite used to wreck that building so completely? Why, I'll wager you the machinery itself has been blown to fragments so tiny that they never could be reassembled."

"I dare say," I conceded, "but explosions have a freakish way of totally destroying some things and leaving others undamaged; and I don't see the wisdom of haste in this case. Tomorrow will be time enough to invite the sheriff's men or the police to the scene."

"And don't forget this—Reaves seems truly to have had powerful influence behind him. It is doubtful if the police of the country would find it convenient to trace him. They are apt to conclude that he has vanished without leaving a clue."

I succeeded at length in convincing him that there was something in this view, and we went to bed to recuperate from the exhausting experiences of the night.

We were astir again, however, as soon as it was light, curious to see for ourselves the extent of the devastation wrought by the explosion. I am not an expert on the subject, but it looked to me as if it must have taken ten thousand pounds of dynamite to bring about the total wiping out of the professor's laboratory, stoutly built, as it had been, of massive blocks of native granite.

Probably Worthington's estimate was nearer the mark; but the agent of destruction had been distributed here and there beneath the structure, as was evidenced by a number of great gaping holes in the earth—and the charges set off simultaneously, probably by an electric spark.

The desolation was indescribable. The building had been blown to atoms, but some of the results seemed curiously inconsistent.

One dynamo, for example, still remained on its base, unharmed. So far

as a cursory examination revealed, it was in perfect order, requiring only to be connected with the driving-wheel of an engine to resume its purpose of producing current. Its neighbor, on the other hand, had taken a sky-rocket course and landed in the center of the tennis-court, a hundred yards away.

Of the gasoline engine itself, all we were able to find and recognize was the cooling-tank, which had lodged in the fork of a huge oak. Probably one of the charges had been directly underneath the place in the shop where the engine had stood.

Of the professor's valuable collection of books, including manuscripts almost priceless, some were found here and there within a wide radius, intact, while others were damaged beyond hope of repair. Worthington decided, however, that wherever a leaf, or even a part of a leaf could be found, it should be rescued and preserved. Doubtless, some librarian would be proud to undertake the task of piecing them together as far as possible, even if he should have to devote the remainder of his life to the work.

His idea was to present the complete volumes, and the pieces, to the National Museum at Washington, seeing that he knew many of them to be the only copies in existence, so far as any known records went.

We soon realized that the task of collecting what was valuable—other things as well as books—from the ruins, was no light undertaking, and Worthington decided to drive to Mercer to engage half a dozen men to excavate for such articles of worth as had been buried in the débris.

While he was gone I searched diligently for any paper that might bear writing in the late Julian Bull's crabbed hand. Firstly, I was anxious to find the will.

Secondly, I was still hopeful that certain of his scientific notes might prove of value, and I felt that if any

thing could be saved that would even partly reimburse my friend for the fortune his uncle had dissipated—a complete plan of the improved periscope, for instance, now ruined beyond hope of reconstruction—the result would be well worth any effort.

Oddly enough, I was totally unsuccessful. Evidently Julian Bull had never been given much to writing, or his notes must have filled several volumes; and some of them would certainly have shown up in the general *mélange*. I concluded that he had preserved only such notes as he had considered of supreme importance.

These, in his small writing, the lines close together on the page, would not be very bulky and—the thought set me seeking more diligently than ever—that no scrap of them could be found could be evidence of but one thing: namely, that there had been a safe after all.

We had seen nothing of such a safe during our ransacking of the shop, including the study and bedroom; but I was now convinced it existed, and felt satisfied that eventually we would find it among the *débris*—unless, like other objects equally strong in construction, it had been blown to atoms.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE UNIVERSAL SOLVENT.

WITHIN two hours, Worthington returned from Mercer, with the buckboard loaded down with workmen. Much to my surprise, I recognized among them several of those who had taken part in the blowing up of the laboratory, and at least one who, acting under Reaves's orders, had helped to overpower and bind Worthington and me, subsequently leaving us helpless, to spend a night in the open.

Before stopping to explain, Worthington set the men at work with the picks and shovels, and crowbars, they had brought with them. His orders

were that whatever looked as though it might be used again was to be recovered; and he was particular to impress on them that the veriest scrap of waste paper—in their eyes—might be worth a great deal. All books and papers had to be rescued and held for his inspection.

Then he joined me and suggested a walk in the old garden.

"But," I protested, "we ought to stay right here and overlook the work. There's no knowing what some of these fellows may pick up on their own account. And considering they are, many of them, the late employees of Rupert Reaves, if they find what he was after, they are likely to retain it and return it to him."

"We shall be back before they have done much more than scratch the surface of that job," he reminded me, and we moved off together.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "none of them will confess to having the remotest idea what Reaves was after. When you consider, it seems likely enough that they are speaking the truth. Why should he tell them?"

"Further, whatever his object was, he seems to believe he has accomplished it, for he took the train last night, and his ticket read through to New York. Perhaps his employers had no use themselves for the 'Universal Solvent'—granting that to have been the magnet—and if they suppose that the destruction of the shop included that of the Solvent, we shall probably hear nothing further from that quarter. Reaves has probably gone to headquarters to report in triumph."

"Come to think of it," said I, "there could have been no other reason for destroying the building, so it is pretty certain you are right."

"Still," I added, "I am by no means certain that Reaves's process must have been effective, and we will be safe to keep an eye on these men. And what about the sheriff?"

Worthington answered thoughtfully.

"So far as the men go," he said, "I am satisfied they are telling the truth. They were hired as laborers at day wages. They were instructed in advance that the nature of the work they were to do was secret, and were sworn to keep their mouths shut.

"When they were ordered to tunnel, they tunneled; but they had no more idea where that tunnel was to lead than you or I had of its existence till last night. When the final charges of dynamite were laid, they realized, of course, that the quantity to be used was exceptional, and their one anxiety was to get as far away as possible before it went off.

"Wilson, the poor devil who was crushed to a jelly under the mass of rock that fell from the edge of the cliff, was the only expert among them, and he, from what I have been able to learn, seems to have been in the spy's confidence.

"As to the attack on ourselves, the men had been warned against trespassers, on the plea that the work on hand was important, and spies might be expected to be about on the lookout for information. Most of the men seem to have concluded that it was nothing less than gold that Reaves was seeking in the old quarry.

"It was Reaves we saw among the pines, at the edge of the cliff—through the periscope, you remember—and he must have watched us return to the house, and, later, start off in the direction of the quarry. He got ahead of us and picked up some fellows he had previously posted on guard.

"Evidently he was taking no chances of all his work coming to naught through premature discovery the very night planned for the final act. The men hid among the bushes till we reached the top ledge where we discovered the tunnel.

"If we had failed to locate that, we might not have been interfered with. As it was, we found the tunnel and explored part of it. Reaves laid a clever trap for us.

"As it was, there were six of them at least to two of us; but Reaves was taking no chances. He shrewdly suspected that we might be armed."

"All that sounds reasonable enough," I admitted. "What about the sheriff?"

"Well, I guess you were right about the influence behind Reaves. At first, the sheriff professed to be incredulous; then, while protesting that he was only too anxious to do his duty and run down law-breakers, he raised many difficulties. All his deputies were at present away on the trail of a wife murderer; and he wanted to know what I had in the way of proof against Reaves, adding that he had always understood that the late professor was engaged in dangerous experiments.

"He wanted to know if I could swear there were no explosives stored in the laboratory itself, which might have gone off accidentally and done all the damage.

"I might have offered to lead him to the tunnel, and pointed out that there were perhaps a dozen men in the towns of Mercer and Grimly who could give evidence in support of yours and mine; but I saw quite plainly how the wind lay with Mr. Sheriff, and I decided to drop the matter entirely for the present."

While Worthington was talking we had stopped almost involuntarily opposite the rose-bed, which we both knew to be Edith Deering's favorite spot in all the garden. The spot had a strong attraction for me, because it was Edith's particular favorite.

Worthington's face too lighted up strangely as he ceased talking, and my heart misgave me. He had often walked with Edith in the garden while I was working hard on the professor's accounts. Perhaps for him this spot held some sweet memory.

But it was of something entirely different that my friend was thinking. He gripped my arm with one hand and pointed with the other.

"Jehoshaphat!" I ejaculated when I saw the object that had attracted his attention. "We win yet!"

"The professor's safe," said Worthington, and we started for it together.

It was a small safe of steel, about three feet long, two feet high, and fifteen inches deep. The form of it suggested that it had been concealed between the concrete and stone walls of the laboratory, probably in the professor's bedchamber, as Martha had been first to suggest.

The fact that we had failed to discover the means of entry, by no means altered the indubitable fact that it had been concealed somewhere about the building, and considering everything, the bedroom seemed to be the most likely place.

The force of the explosion had thrown the safe high in the air and landed it eighty yards away in the center of Edith's rose-bed. The drop had buried it almost completely in the soft soil of the garden, but Worthington's alert eye had detected the top of it projecting a few inches above the surface.

We tried to move it with our hands, but of course that was impossible; and then we hastened to the tool-shed at the far corner of the enclosure and returned with spades and crowbars.

Half an hour sufficed to unearth it and stand it right end up. But even so, we could only gaze at it in mingled triumph and perplexity. We had our hare, but the puzzle how to cook it still remained to be solved.

"I don't want to call on any of the workmen to help," said Worthington, "but I don't see how we are to get it to the house unaided—or unseen."

"I dare say we might manage it on rollers, after dark," I suggested. "Meantime, we ought to have buried it deeper instead of digging it out."

"That sounds like sense," Worthington admitted. "Suppose we make the hole a bit deeper and put it back?"

No sooner said than started. I

jumped into the hole and commenced spading out the loose earth.

"Hold on a bit," he interrupted my labors. "Perhaps I can open it."

"Nonsense!" I responded. "You are no safe-breaker, and it might take you ten years to work out the combination by experiment."

"Not so fast," he insisted. "The combination that opened the steel door in the outer wall surrounding the shop was the same that controlled the door of the shop itself—which shows that my uncle was simple enough in his notions, in some respects."

"Now, it is just barely possible that he considered it much easier to remember one combination that would open three separate doors, than to recall three separate combinations each opening only one door. My suggestion is that the same old open sesame may work the oracle in this case as it did in the others; and if it will, it surely will save us a lot of effort. The contents will be much easier to handle than the safe itself."

He was already working assiduously, turning the handle this way and that, his brow puckered in an effort to recall the formula. When he was through, he swore softly, for the door remained fast shut.

"We'd better bury it now," I suggested, "and—"

"Hold on!" he cried excitedly. "I got it wrong. It goes 'Once to four and three times to eight'—I'll try again. I had these two the wrong way round."

This time, at the final turn, the door swung open and we craned forward, Worthington with a shout of triumph.

"Holy Mike!" he exclaimed. "The Universal Solvent!"

He had pounced on a small metal box about six inches by four by four. The lid was held in place by two thumb-screws, which he loosened. Inside, the box was stuffed with cotton wool, which he proceeded to unpack with considerable care. In the center appeared a cylindrical object rounded

at each end. This he picked out triumphantly.

"The silicon container!" he announced, and held it up to the light. In the center of the container I could just make out a movement of liquid that showed through, a weak-teaish brown in color.

"Um—there isn't much of it," I commented. "It's all in the middle."

"There's only about half an ounce," he responded. "But if what my uncle claimed was correct, it is quite enough to do an awful lot of damage—and more than enough to make us both multimillionaires, when we know how to handle it and keep it under control."

"You see for yourself," he went on, "that the container is a sort of improved thermos bottle on a small scale. It is so constructed that the liquid is entirely surrounded by a vacuum; and, that vacuum is perfect."

He placed the vacuum container in an inner pocket, and started examining the papers which the safe contained.

"Good," he cried abruptly; "here is the formula!"

"Um—cipher," he added.

He had just opened a folded sheet of thin paper of tough fabric. He refolded it and put it in the same pocket with the solvent.

"Better yet!" I exclaimed in turn. "Here is your uncle's will."

I had recognized the sheet of foolscap described by old Martha, and for the moment it interested me more than the Universal Solvent itself. I put it in my own pocket, and then we gathered up the remaining papers the safe contained.

They were all neatly tied in bundles, and consisted of the professor's notes on various subjects. "Memoranda on the Improved Periscope," I read on one, and two others were inscribed respectively, "Memoranda on the processes necessary to obtain the Universal Solvent" and "Memoranda on the production of Id, the Primary Element."

There were others, and we loaded ourselves with them and carried them to the house.

For a while we were at a loss what to do with these papers and the Solvent for safe keeping; but Worthington thought once more of the sliding panel in the wall of the library, behind which there was the switchboard, now no longer of any use, since the circuits it had controlled had been broken for all time when the laboratory went up in the air.

He pressed the hidden button in the pillar of the mantelpiece, and, sliding open the panel, we dumped everything within the cavity, except the will, which I retained in my possession.

"I wouldn't trust them there too long if Reaves were still round," Worthington remarked. "Fortunately, he is under the impression that the destruction of the shop turned all the tricks, in his favor. We have certainly the laugh on him for the present, and on his employers, whoever they may be."

Back to the garden we went, for our task was not yet completed. We felt that it would be no more than wise to remove all traces of our recent labors. If any of the men still at work on the site of the laboratory should see the empty safe and the hole in the garden, and it should come to the ears of Reaves or any of his immediate assistants, the man would never rest till he had made a further attempt to gain possession of or destroy the Universal Solvent.

I do not doubt that he would have blown up the house, as he already had the shop, if the opportunity offered, and he believed that by so doing his purpose would at last be served.

Hastily, then, we resumed our digging. When the hole was deep enough we closed the metal box with the cotton-wool wherein the container of silicon had been packed inside, and placed it back in the safe, the door of which was shut as tightly as ever.

Then, with a little more or less skill



ful levering with the crowbars, we dumped the whole thing back in the hole and shoveled the soil about and over it, beating it well down, but spreading some loose earth on top to restore the surface to its original condition as nearly as possible.

Finally we scattered the soil left over and straightened up with groans and mutterings—only to laugh grimly at the futility of all our effort.

Our eyes for an instant looked straight into the cold eyes of Rupert Reaves above the wall of the garden.

How long Reaves had been there watching us I know not; but we had surprised him by looking up when we did, before he had time to drop on the other side of the wall.

## CHAPTER XV.

### PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

My first feeling when I realized that Reaves had undoubtedly seen that we had been burying something, whether or not he knew that it was a safe, was one of exasperation.

"All that hard work and backache for nothing!" I growled.

"Come to think of it, I'm not so sure," Worthington responded. "If Reaves happens to have seen the safe and is fool enough to suppose the Universal Solvent may still be inside, it'll be rather a joke to have him carry it off in the night.

"I wonder if he knows we saw him?"

"He must," said I. "But if we leave things as they are now, and take no further steps for the present, he may conclude that we didn't."

Following out this suggestion, we took pains to return the tools to the shed where we had found them and, with laborious circumspection, left the garden for the house, only to emerge a few minutes later and stroll nonchalantly over to where the workmen were busily engaged in carrying out Worthington's instructions.

They were sorting out various articles as they recovered them, placing books and fragments of books on one pile, odds and ends of machinery fit to be utilized again in another, and broken metal, *et cetera*, on a scrap-heap, which was growing quicker than all the others taken together.

With intervals for meals, we spent the rest of the day at the task of carrying what we considered of most value into the house and collecting scattered manuscript from all round within a radius of a hundred and fifty yards. These we were particularly anxious about in case it should come on to rain before we had rescued all.

After dark, when the workmen had gone, we opened Julian Bull's will. For the most part it reiterated the arguments the professor had used in conversation the night of our coming in answer to his summons to Worthington.

They were in the nature of an apology for the irregularities in his stewardship of his nephew's fortune, and the document dwelt on the great services he had done to science and the enormous power which the discovery of the Universal Solvent put into the hands of its possessor, since it was the key—as he claimed—to boundless wealth.

His notes, other than those relating to the Universal Solvent, but including those on the subject of Id, he bequeathed to the nation. Those relating to the solvent, the formula for producing it, and the solvent itself—all that existed was the half-ounce in its silicon container, now reposing in the cavity behind the sliding panel in the room where we sat—he willed to "My nephew, Frank Bruce Worthington, as the just return for the investments in my experimental work."

I myself, had I been granted time (the will went on), would have used the Solvent in transmuting from lead enough gold to reimburse my nephew many times over; but of late I have felt that the end was approach-

ing. I thank God that my labors have not been altogether in vain.

One thing that gave me intense satisfaction with the will was that Julian Bull had duly named his nephew as his successor in the trusteeship of Edith Deering's estate. This was exactly what I had hoped, for it simplified the business of putting her affairs in order.

One secret of the past we learned from the curious document that explained much that had taken place at our first interview, and which I could only guess at at the time. Before Julian Bull had immolated his life on the altar of science he had loved Frank Worthington's mother.

That she had preferred his half-brother had been a blow; but it had not embittered him, for it was for his mother's sake that he had shown a fondness for his nephew, though that affection had been expressed in person only in the closing week or so of his own life.

After we had buried the safe in the rose-bed and seen the man we had reason to consider an enemy spying upon us from the top of the garden-wall, we saw nothing more of Reaves that day, nor the next.

The second morning after, however, when we repaired to the garden to look over the ground, it was to find that the rose-bed had once more been disturbed, nor did it take us long to verify our supposition that the safe had been moved bodily. Our satisfaction was great accordingly, for this time we knew that the man had been fooled.

We returned to the house in time to intercept the postman. There were several letters for each of us; but both of us opened first envelopes that were identical.

Edith had written at last.

I will confess that I was disappointed in mine. The letter was friendly, and its tone showed that, with her friend, Milly French, she had at least partially recovered her good spirits. She imparted the disquieting informa-

tion that the family was shortly going to Washington to visit a few weeks at the home of Milly's uncle. I happened to know, from a conversation we had had, that there was also a dashing cousin—of Milly's—at present in training as a naval cadet at Annapolis, and soon to take his final examinations before graduating.

But, for the most part, her communication was in the nature of instructions to her attorney. She emphasized again her determination to divide her fortune with her cousin, unaware of the provision in her father's will that made this impossible before she attained the age of twenty-five.

From the way in which Worthington eyed me, I surmised his letter had been no more satisfactory than mine, and I regretted exceedingly that my duty dictated that I should apprise him of his cousin's desire regarding the estate.

However, I did not give him the satisfaction which I might have afforded him by reading all of the epistle, leaving him in the dark as to what she might have said before coming to the business part, which was all I felt called on to read.

As I had expected, it only made him uncomfortable.

"It seems that my cousin has talked of this with you before," he said after frowning at me in thoughtful silence for about a minute.

"Yes," I admitted.

"You didn't mention it," he commented. "What did you say to her?"

"I told her," I responded, "that it was not to be thought of—that I was sure you wouldn't consider it for a moment."

"Thanks, old man," he said heartily, shaking me by the hand. "I wouldn't, of course, and I'm glad you had that much faith in me."

It occurred to both Worthington and me that while Reaves was off on a wild-goose chase—probably having taken the safe to some expert to have

it opened—would be a very good time for us to clear out with the Universal Solvent and put it somewhere for permanent safe-keeping.

We realized that it was not safe in the panel in the library when so desperate a character as Reaves had proved himself to be was still on the hunt; but we did not feel that we could leave Worthington Grange as yet. The property belonged to Edith, and we were anxious to get rid of the workmen as soon as possible and leave everything as ship-shape as we could.

When Worthington had gone to Mercer to bring the men he had ordered a glazier to come next day, or as soon as he was at liberty, to repair the broken windows; but so far the man had failed to put in an appearance. He allowed another day to pass and then rode down to the town to remind the man of his promise and insist on his coming right away.

The same afternoon, just when I was beginning to wonder what on earth could be keeping him so long, a messenger arrived from Worthington. He brought a note, and I tore it open with some misgiving that an accident must have befallen him, but I was far from dreaming what actually had happened. He had been arrested.

I wasted no time in saddling the remaining horse and riding to the town as if life itself were involved. I was burning with indignation and sorely at a loss to understand on what charge my friend could possibly be held. His note had told me nothing beyond the bare fact of his arrest.

Arrived at the jail, I had some difficulty in seeing Worthington at all, and only the fact that I am a lawyer, and that the sheriff was rather shaky as regards the law, enabled me to bluff my way past the stolid official, who at last consented to unlock the door of the cell where the prisoner was confined, only stipulating that he should remain in that hole of a place with us as long as I remained.

When the voice of Reaves sounded

outside, however, he left us for a time, locking us both in against any attempt on Worthington's part to escape.

What surprised me more than my friend's arrest was his apparent cheerfulness. I questioned him impatiently.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "It is only another joke on Reaves."

"I don't see the funny part yet," I protested. "I wish you would point it out."

"Why," he explained more soberly, "when I learned that the only glazier in this one-horse village could not come to the Grange for two days yet, I decided to take the train to Fenton, the next town, and secure a man there. Evidently I was under surveillance, for as I stepped on the train a man in citizen's clothes arrested me."

"But on what charge?" I protested.

"That's what I wanted to know, but he just showed me his deputy's badge and poked a gun in my ribs, and demanded to know if I was coming peaceably or not. I went along and he conducted me to the sheriff's office, where I learned that I had been arrested on a charge of assault sworn out by Reaves."

"Preposterous!" I exclaimed. "I'll have you out of here in less than no time; and, by thunder, some one will have to pay handsomely for this outrage."

"Shucks, man; you don't see the point yet," he went on. "You remember the nice little electric shock our friend got the night he attacked you? Well, that was excuse enough for the arrest."

"The real reason for it was that it was supposed by Reaves, or the man who arrested me at his orders, that I was off to New York, and probably carried the Solvent with me. They wanted a chance to search me, and they have had it. That is the joke."

I was still indignant and not at all willing to treat the matter lightly, when the sheriff reappeared and blandly informed me that I was under arrest on the same charge as Worthington.

I protested vigorously, quoting law and urging all the arguments I could think of; but I saw it was no use. We were being treated to some very convincing evidence of the strength of Reaves's influence.

When I had been searched in turn I was returned to the same cell with Worthington, all my efforts to obtain bail having been unavailing, and we prepared to spend the night there.

Worthington's mood underwent a change at that prospect, not so much on his own account as on that of old Martha and John Foster, who, he rightly considered, had had more than their share of excitement in the past few days. It had occurred to me, and I had communicated the idea to him, that the reason we were held after our captors had convinced themselves that neither of us carried the Universal Solvent on his person, was that they now proposed to make a raid of the house, and would doubtless search it from cellar to attic.

And that is exactly what they did, as we speedily found on our return next day. Fortunately, that was the day on which the court sat in Mercer, and as no one appeared to press the charge against us we were promptly discharged.

We found Martha and John in a high state of nervousness, and everything in the house had been turned topsy-turvy. Bureau and dresser drawers had been opened and searched; closets, trunks, and bags, the buffet in the dining-room, the bookshelves in the library—nothing had been overlooked, even in parts of the house that had not been in use for almost twenty years; nothing, that is, except the hollow panel in the library, wherein the Solvent and its formula lay in temporary security.

"See here," said Worthington angrily, "this thing has got to be put a stop to somehow. If they come again they won't leave one stone on top of another, unless we lead the hunt over new country."

"What do you propose?" I asked.

"We shall return to New York, starting to-night, and we shall take the Solvent with us."

"And how do you propose to avoid Reaves and his men?" I asked.

"I have a plan," he responded, and proceeded to unfold it.

In pursuance of that plan, we left Worthington Grange at eleven o'clock that night on horseback and rode twenty miles, to Rochester, in the direction opposite from Mercer, and there took train for Portland.

From Portland we purposed returning to New York by steamer, and by taking passage under fictitious names we flattered ourselves that we had succeeded in losing Reaves and all his gang, for a time at least.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SECRET FORMULA.

As to the future, Worthington's plan was to place the silicon container in a safety-deposit vault in New York; but before I reached that city an objection I raised dissuaded him from this course.

After all, if the professor's idea as to the power behind Reaves was right—and we had had some evidence to support the theory that it well might be—a bank or trust company was the last kind of institution to which we should go.

"There may be something in that," Worthington agreed when I broached this view.

"I certainly don't intend to lose possession now till I have gone into the records of my uncle's experiments—perhaps tried to duplicate some of them," he added. "But I don't, for the life of me, see why the money trust should be so confoundedly anxious to get hold of the stuff or destroy it."

"Even the little you have in that vacuum bottle," I reminded him, "must be capable, according to the

professor's claims, of producing from lead more gold than you could possibly spend in a lifetime. Think what it would mean if you should discover the key to the formula and be able to produce the Solvent in quantity.

"It would bring about a total upsetting in present money values. Gold could no longer remain the standard of the world, for it would be worth no more than you chose to dictate. The bank reserves would sink in worth to the vanishing point, the government itself would be bankrupt.

"Diamonds, too, you could produce in unlimited quality, and they would cease to have any greater value than so much glass. That would not matter so much, for there are other precious stones which, being compound substances, could not be transmuted to anything but Id. But what metal could replace gold as the money standard?"

"What's the matter with Id itself?" he demanded with a grin.

"You forget its weight," I reminded him. "Those little cubes your uncle showed us weighed four ounces—unless he was fooling us by scientific jugglery, as I am still more than half inclined to suspect. And, depend upon it, the powers that be are quite satisfied with things as they are, and would not stand for your butting in with that Universal Solvent business.

"Why, even the news of its existence becoming public would cause a panic, compared with which those of 1893 and 1907 would loom up in retrospect as national picnics."

"But do you really suppose the men behind the finances of this old U. S. A. of ours are the sort that would believe a story of a Universal Solvent coming from an obscure experimentalist through correspondence with a few old fogies occupying chairs of science at some college or other?" he queried.

"They wouldn't swallow it whole, I suppose," I admitted; "but they might send a man like Rupert Reaves to investigate. When they learned of that

laboratory, guarded by a high wall and a network of live wires, they would become genuinely curious, and decide that it was as well to take no chances.

"Take the blowing up of the laboratory," I went on. "Of course, it may have been only spite on Reaves's part; but is it likely he would have gone to all that trouble and expense to gratify a personal hatred? Is it not much more likely that he was carrying out instructions from higher up?"

"Well, these financiers may be conservative in their ideas; but they're certainly progressive in their methods when it comes to action," he responded.

"Your arguments about fit in with my own thoughts," he added; "though even now I am hardly convinced on all points."

This speech recalled me to myself. Till now it was I who had been the doubter; now I found myself supporting the beliefs of the professor and deducing sound reasons why the "money trust," so called, should be anxious to destroy the Universal Solvent.

When we reached the East River and the vessel by which we had come from Portland tied up alongside the wharf, it was already too late to take steps for the safeguarding of the Solvent short of hiring an automobile, driving into the wilds, and burying it.

As we were satisfied, however, that we had given Reaves and his men the slip, and had every reason to believe so, we had no hesitation in carrying it with us to the flat off Washington Square. Moreover, we realized that the formula would be of more value to any one who could decipher it than the vacuum bottle and its contents, and we were both keen to make an attempt to solve the riddle of that closely written sheet of thin paper.

We dined at a little Italian place on Eighth Avenue that was one of our favorite haunts, and afterward, taking a taxi, drove to the apartment, and got busy.

Ciphers have long been a hobby of

mine, and I had a number of books on the subject at the flat. While Worthington dipped into these with a newly awakened enthusiasm, I bent all my faculties and acquired knowledge to the document in hand. But I could make nothing of it. The key persistently eluded me.

One in the morning found us both weary from the fatigues of traveling followed by our concentrated efforts to solve the cipher.

"Let's go to bed," Worthington suggested, with a yawn. "Perhaps if you sleep on it, you will have the solution when you wake up in the morning. I used to work out problems in mathematics that way at college.

"The process is to concentrate on the problem calling for solution till you're weary; then go to bed thinking of it. Toss round till sleep comes unawares. In the morning, there is the answer all ready for you, and you wonder why in thunder you didn't see it before."

He picked up the formula and locked it in his desk, where already he had placed the silicon bottle containing the Universal Solvent, whose secret we sought, and we exchanged good nights.

Worthington's words were prophetic; but it didn't take me all night to solve that cipher. I woke up about three o'clock, muttering again and again: "Solvent, seven letters—Solvent, seven letters."

Then I thought of the formula, and I knew the subject was still fermenting in my brain; only, I could not see the connection. But it came to me in a moment. I remembered that I had read somewhere that a word of seven letters was the best that could be used as a key to the Confederate cipher; and I also recalled that Worthington's uncle had come of a Southern family—Worthington, too, for that matter—a family that had provided many heroes for the Revolution.

"Eureka!" I cried, "I've got it!" Springing out of bed, I slipped on a woolen bath-robe and slippers, and crossed the narrow hall to Worthington's bedroom.

"What's the matter?" he murmured sleepily as I shook him and whispered his name—this method being more effective in waking a person than shouting.

"Get up," said I excitedly. "I've got it."

"Got what, you idiot?" he growled, sitting up in bed and looking at the clock on the dresser—I had switched on the electric light on entering the room.

"What in blazes are you doing out of bed at this unearthly hour?" he complained.

"It's the Confederacy code," I answered jubilantly, "and the key is the word—Solvent."

"We'll try it in the morning," he responded. "You're probably wrong at that. Go back to bed."

"I'm sure of it," I insisted. "Your uncle was proud of his family connections with those who fought for the Confederate forces, wasn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, whether or no, I recognize the form. All we have to do is take a blocked-out square of the alphabet. The top line of the square consists of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, and the first vertical column also—A at the top and Z at the bottom. The second vertical column starts with B, of course, and ends with A following Z; the third starts with C and ends with B, *et cetera*. Why, I showed you the whole thing this evening."

"I know all that; but how do you read it?"

"In putting the formula into code, your uncle would write the code word, which I am morally sure was Solvent, above the words of the formula again and again. S over the first letter, O over the second, and so on to the T over the seventh. Then S again over the eighth, O over the ninth, L over



the tenth, till every letter of the entire document was covered with a letter of the code word.

"To turn the document into code, he would take the first S, together with the first letter in the document. The S he would find in the top line of the blocked square, and the first letter of the original in the outside vertical column; then following a line downward from the S and another across from the other letter, he would take the letter whereat they met as the first letter of the code version. Similarly with the second and all the other letters.

"To read the formula we have only to reverse the process: first write 'solvent' — 'solvent' — 'solvent' — over the code version, then trace down the columns in which each letter of the present document appears at the top, till we come to the corresponding letter of the code word. Trace the horizontal line back to the margin, and there in the left-hand vertical column we will find the first letter of the original."

"That sounds like a long job to me," Worthington demurred.

"And how do you know solvent is the word?"

"I won't try to read the whole thing to-night," I concluded; "but I have a hunch that solvent is the key word. When you think of it, it is just the word the professor would choose. He had been eating it, sleeping with it, living with it for years. I want to try it out, anyway, and I sha'n't sleep a wink if I don't."

"All right, we'll try it," he agreed briskly, hopping out of bed, pulling on his pants, and donning a jacket.

"As I have already made out the blocked square, it won't take us long to make a convincing test," I remarked, as Worthington opened the door of our library sitting-room, fronting the street. He recoiled with an exclamation; then we both started forward.

The window shade was raised and

the window was open. The light from a street-lamp on the opposite side of the way was reflected from the ceiling and shone on Worthington's desk, which had been forced open.

Beside the desk we discovered the figure of a man standing at bay. As he turned toward us the face was in shadow.

I switched on the electric light and recognized the vindictive countenance of Rupert Reaves, his teeth bared in a snarl such as a wild animal might give.

In his left hand he held the vacuum bottle of silicon and the precious formula. The ugly scar that stretched the length of his cheek showed alternately red and white, giving him a repulsive appearance. With his right hand he drew a revolver from his pocket and curtly ordered us to throw up our hands.

We were unarmed, and we obeyed; but Worthington restrained himself with difficulty, and I knew it would only be a matter of seconds ere he would throw himself upon the spy, reckless of consequences.

Reaves seemed to sense this, and he backed toward the open window, where a dangling rope suggested that he had lowered himself from the roof, which doubtless he had gained from an empty house next door.

The house was an old brown-stone front, and our apartment on the third floor had a narrow balcony protected by an iron railing. But the railing was rust-eaten and frail, and as Worthington, incensed by the imminence of the escape of the thief, and the loss of the Universal Solvent, sprang forward, Reaves backed suddenly and violently against the weakened structure.

It yielded to his weight and, with a sense of impending horror, I saw the man clutch wildly at the air in an effort to retain his balance, reel on the outer edge of the stone ledge, his face distorted by the fear of death, and fall.

A moment after, Worthington and I were gazing down into the street below.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MONEY POWER.

It is with diffidence that I write of the extraordinary happenings of that awful moment when Reaves fell to the sidewalk from the height of three stories. I could wish that I might cite newspaper accounts published at the time; but strong pressure was brought to bear to suppress all reports.

The few people who were awake at that time in the early morning in the neighborhood spoke of "winter being early this year," and swore midst the laughter and jeers of their friends, that snow and even hail had fallen in the night.

The heated arguments that ensued from this oft-repeated statement were speedily forgotten, except by those who had actually been awakened by the sudden cold snap, and never could understand why "Brown" or "Smith," living only three blocks away, declared that they hadn't got home till 4.30 A.M. on the morning in question, and the entire night had been muggy, humid, and exceptionally warm for October.

The explanation of these conflicting experiences is that the snow flurry fell only over an area of one block.

But let me start with what Worthington and I saw when we reached the window, and lying on our stomachs peered over the edge of the balcony, now railless.

I think I may say we saw Reaves's body reach the sidewalk; but that was all. I can only explain the next fraction of a second by saying there was a flash of "darkning." The expression is Worthington's, but it is accurate.

The reader knows what a flash of lightning is, and I must leave it to him to comprehend what I try to convey when I speak of "darkning." Un-

doubtedly, the silicon container had been broken in the fall, and the Universal Solvent had got free.

Its action was instant, and one effect was to absorb completely all light within a considerable radius, so as to bring on darkness—but only a momentary flash of it.

Again, there was a terrific rush of air that caused a displacement all over the city, and so violent in our immediate vicinity as to rattle shutters from their hinges and smash several windows.

After the flash of "darkning" we were able to see into the street again. What we expected to discern was the mangled remains of the spy. There was no sign of him. Neither was there any fragment of the treacherous railing. But in the sidewalk below us, stretching to the curb and a little way beyond, was a gaping hole.

"Great Cæsar!" Worthington exclaimed. "We've got to go down and investigate."

I shivered with the intense cold that had suddenly come upon us, and I looked at my companion.

"Rub your nose," I cried warningly.

"Better rub yours, too," he retorted. "It's got that white, solid look that means frost-bite, and days of agony when the thawing-out process is on."

Tweaking vigorously at our respective noses and ears, we hastened to the street, stopping only a few minutes to don more clothing. When we emerged from the front door it was to realize that there had been a slight fall of hail, and even now snowflakes were planing gently down upon us. We gazed in wonder at the great hole yawning at our feet.

"Looks like the effect of an explosion; but where's the débris?" said a voice behind us.

We turned simultaneously and started in further surprise. The speaker was a tall, broad-shouldered man of striking dignity of aspect. He

wore a light opera-cloak over evening clothes, and a silk hat. Involuntarily he shivered, and his lips were blue.

Tiny icicles clung to the points of his heavy black mustache and from his bushy eyebrows. What startled us, however, was that we recognized in him a figure well known in the financial district, and indeed, from newspaper portraits at least, known all over the world.

Mr. Brinckley I shall call this man, and I shall not further identify him beyond stating that he was, until recently, one of the big six in the financial world—one of the handful of men reputed to control the banking business of this great country.

"Not an explosion," Worthington answered quietly. "An *implosion*."

"Eh, what's that? An *implosion*! Never heard of such a thing," said Brinckley, his eyes brightening with interest.

"Nevertheless, that is exactly what has taken place," Worthington insisted. "The exact opposite of an explosion."

"Ah!" exclaimed the magnate, and the word was followed by a sharp intake of breath.

"You yourself have remarked on the entire absence of *débris*," my friend went on. "As you seem to have been very near when the—er—accident happened, you would observe the entire absence of sound, so marked that it might fittingly be described as a loud silence."

I recalled that, though I had seen windows smash outwards across the way, there had been no sound of broken glass falling, and Worthington's lips, as we leaned over the ledge above, had formed the words, "My God! He will be killed," but no sound had issued from them.

"No doubt," Worthington continued, "you would also note the flash of 'darkning'; and your own mustache bears testimony to the fact that there was no heat generated, but intense cold. You can see for yourself

that hail and snow have fallen. That was because the air was heavily surcharged with moisture which froze immediately the surrounding heat was absorbed."

Late as the hour was—or early, if the reader prefer—a crowd was beginning to gather, though for the moment the people kept at a respectful distance, uncertain as to whether there might not be danger in nearer approach.

"We must try to get rid of these people," Worthington said decidedly.

"Leave it to me," said Brinckley, and he approached the lieutenant of reserves, who came up at that moment on the run, evidently summoned by some startled householder.

"What's all the trouble?" demanded the officer briskly.

Then he recognized the man he was addressing, and he saluted respectfully.

The magnate spoke to him a few seconds; and the lieutenant issued a sharp command, upon which the police started dispersing the curious onlookers. A call for more men was sent in, and within ten minutes two cordons of police were drawn across the street, one at each end of the block.

"Now," said Brinckley, returning to Worthington and me, "I want to get down into that hole."

His eyes expressed cunning and cupidity, but my friend only smiled.

"I should judge it to be only eight feet deep, or thereabouts," he responded. "Mr. Morton and I will gladly give you a hand."

It needed the two of us to support him, and it was no easy task at that, for while he was active enough, he was positively the heaviest man for his size I have ever known of.

"Concentrated gravity," Worthington remarked; then, as the banker touched bottom, he straightened up.

"Just take a good look at me, my boy," he invited.

I was forced to laugh. In the excitement of the first few minutes I

had failed to notice it, but his figure, instead of being perpendicular to the street, was at a decided angle—I repeat: straight, but at an angle to the sidewalk.

I looked beyond him to the nearest line of police, about forty yards away. With them the effect was grotesque. To maintain their balance they had to hold their bodies at an angle to the roadway—perfectly straight and rigid, but at an angle of almost thirty degrees from the perpendicular. Evidently they themselves had noticed it, judging from the expressions of bewilderment on their usually stolid countenances.

The crowd beyond the line of blue-coated men was laughing and jeering at the officers and at each other. The police at the other end of the block were not affected. Apparently they were beyond the zone of influence.

"What has changed the center of gravity?" I demanded.

"Id," my friend replied laconically.

"Id! Where?" I exclaimed, peering again into the pit at our feet, at the bottom of which Brinckley was groping almost on all fours.

Worthington produced a box of matches and, striking one, held it in the cup of his hand so that the light was thrown downward.

At the instant our eyes caught a glimpse of a small object in the center, whose characteristic rose-colored flame I immediately recognized; the banker's hand closed over it. He tried to grasp and lift it; but his fingers slipped off the hard surface, smoother than plate-glass.

There was a look of exasperation on his face as he turned it upward. Worthington laughed heartily at his evident discomfiture.

"That is Id, Mr. Brinckley," he explained. "And that morsel, which from here looks to be about three inches cube, weighs something between forty and fifty tons. If bed-rock had not happened to be near the surface at this spot, we'd never have

seen it, for the pressure is so enormous on so small a base that it would force its way downward through anything of less density."

"You mean to say that all the material that formerly filled the space occupied by this hole went to the making of that insignificant block of what you call Id?" demanded Brinckley incredulously.

"Where else did it go?" my friend countered.

"There was a pause while the banker adjusted his faculties to grasp this extraordinary suggestion and incidentally to measure the dimensions of the pit with his eye.

"Even so. I can't see that there are forty tons of material gone," he objected.

"No, something over twenty tons," Worthington answered. "But one of the properties of Id is that it has an independent gravity pull equal to the pull of the earth upon it. Hence the doubled weight."

We had to call two policemen to help get Brinckley out of the pit. At last I realized why he appeared to be such a heavy man. We had to pull against a double gravity attraction.

"Suppose we go up to your apartment," the banker suggested as he shook the loose dirt from his clothes. "I have a proposition to make."

"First I must call up the water department and the gas and electricity companies," said Worthington.

"Whatever for?" I asked.

He lighted another match, and I saw the reason. Portions of the gas and water pipes and of the electric under the sidewalk and curb had been absorbed with the other materials that had gone to the making—by transmutation—of that three-inch cube of Id. Fortunately, both the water and the gas had frozen solid, this preventing immediate escape.

"These frozen chunks will speedily thaw," said Worthington, "and the people concerned must cut off the supplies till repairs can be made."

"We'd better get some workmen to barricade that pit and a section of the street," said Brinckley. "We've got to keep people away and keep all this as quiet as possible."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A DEAL IN ID.

It was Brinckley who choked off curious reporters who began to arrive and gave instructions as to the erecting of barriers, while Worthington telephoned to the water department and the gas and electric companies whose properties had been damaged. Then the three of us went up-stairs to our apartment.

"I take it," the banker began, "that Professor Bull's Universal Solvent is no longer in existence."

Here was practically an admission that he had been more than duly interested in that Solvent, and, reading our faces, he made no attempt to dodge the issue.

"There is no use in beating about the bush," he said. "I admit that I and my associates have been anxious to secure the Solvent—to destroy it. You are both men of intelligence, and you should be able to see why."

"Destruction of gold standard and all the rest of it," Worthington answered. "But how came you to believe in Professor Bull's theories?"

"I was at college with him, and I knew the man. When Brown, of Wisconsin, wrote and told me that the professor claimed to have discovered a Universal Solvent that, among other things, would turn or transmute lead into gold, I was more than half convinced of the truth of the assertion.

"Of course, I knew the man might have lost his mental balance, and that his claim might be only a vagary of a disordered intellect; but my associates and I decided we could not afford to take chances. We had to make sure.

"And, believe me, gentlemen," he

added, "whatever opposition we may recently have had from the Treasury Department, in this matter the department was heartily with us, and even the President himself. To shake the money standard would bring disaster on the whole country.

"Even a rumor of all this finding its way into the press—a contingency which I have already guarded against—might cause a panic. Rumor may do that when the pockets of ninety millions of people are concerned—ignoring for the moment the other nations of the civilized world."

Worthington nodded.

"You may set your mind at ease, sir," he said. "Every drop of the Universal Solvent became a force—the force that went to the making of that cube of Id that lies on bed-rock below our window."

"And the formula?" he eagerly queried.

"Your agent stole that with the Solvent," my friend answered bluntly. "Doubtless it is incorporated in the same cube."

The face of the banker blanched and his voice, when he next spoke, was only a husky whisper.

"And Reaves?" he asked. "I saw him fall, from my station in a doorway at the other side of the street. What became of him?"

"What became of the concrete sidewalk, of the paving blocks at the edge of the roadway, of the soil, of the gas-pipes and the water-pipes and the electric-wires?" asked Worthington with compressed lips.

"My God!" muttered the magnate, and the three of us fell silent.

"He leaves a wife and three small children. I must look after them," Brinckley added at length; and we continued our discussion under less constraint.

"I suppose that cube of Id rightly belongs to you, Mr. Worthington?" said the banker.

"Confidentially, I may say that almost my friend's entire fortune,

amounting to a quarter of a million, was expended on the professor's experiments," I put in.

"I know," Brinckley answered.

"You know!" exclaimed Worthington in surprise. "What do you mean?"

The money magnate smiled.

"We made it our business to find out," he responded.

"Now for my proposition," he added. "If the banks holding your securities against loans relinquished these securities for a nominal consideration, and if, in addition, I should guarantee you the payment of two hundred thousand dollars cash, would you relinquish your claim to that cube of Id?"

Worthington hesitated.

"I don't see why you should want it," he answered at length.

Brinckley smiled again.

"In my leisure moments I am something of a scientist myself," he responded. "But the whole scientific world is going to be intensely interested in that new element."

"It is the only true element, according to my uncle's theories," said Worthington.

"That may be true," the banker conceded. "At any rate, I want to buy it as a gift to the nation. It is my idea of unique philanthropy."

There was another pause while my friend considered.

"I shall accept your terms," he said at last. "Only," he added whimsically, "you must accept delivery on the spot where the Id lies. I refuse to pay transportation charges."

"That is entirely satisfactory," Brinckley answered. "If you have pen and paper, we may as well sign a formal agreement now. Mr. Morton is an attorney and notary public, I believe. He can draw up and attest the document."

"Your uncle made a wise investment of your fortune, after all," I remarked when Brinckley had gone, bearing with him the agreement that surrendered to him possession of the

only piece of Id in the world. The few tiny particles that had been scattered in the explosion that totally destroyed the professor's laboratory need hardly be taken into consideration, as they certainly never would be found.

"Yes, he did!" exclaimed Worthington, his eye lighting up as it rested on the check the banker had left in his hand.

"Two hundred thousand," he muttered — "and more to come. Now I can go to E—"

He stopped and looked frowningly at me. I met his gaze squarely.

"I think we'd better go to bed and try to get some sleep," I suggested.

But before we went to our respective rooms he placed a hand on my shoulder.

"This will make no difference," he said. "We shall tell her nothing about the money—till after."

Recognizing his exceptionally generous proposition as such, I shook him warmly by the hand.

Brinckley must have seen to it personally that his orders were carried out, for when I got up about eight o'clock and looked into the street, already much had been accomplished. The hole in the sidewalk had been widened, and workmen were busy repairing the broken gas and water pipes and wires, deflecting their course so as to leave clear space where the cube of Id lay.

A wooden barricade had been erected about the pit, and the street at either end of the block had been "closed for repairs." Two policemen at either end saw to it that only residents and tradesmen should pass.

It was amusing to watch these, and the workmen who came and went. As a person approached the hole beneath our window, his body would be inclined backward, as if he were going down a steep hill, while one walking away would be bent forward as if climbing. The effect on a street that is almost level was ludicrous in the extreme.



And this state of affairs continued for several days, for the problem of removing a three-inch cube that weighs well over forty tons is not easy of solution. Some of the engineers consulted suggested boring under the Id and slipping a steel girder into place beneath it; but no one could solve the problem of supplying a girder capable of being manipulated in this way strong enough to support such an enormous weight over an area of nine square inches. Besides, there was no means of getting such a girder into place.

When Worthington was called into consultation, he recalled that, in dealing with a smaller piece of Id, the professor had used an electro-magnetic crane—to release our pocket knives, the reader will remember.

The difficulty here presented was that no such crane capable of raising a concentrated load of over forty tons had as yet been designed. One firm of engineers, however, undertook to construct one, and when it arrived rails had to be specially laid to carry it through the streets.

Powerful as was this gigantic engine, it broke under the strain put on it as soon as the powerful current was turned on; but this preliminary failure told the experts where additional strength was required, and the engine was made more powerful where necessary. The second trial was a success, and the mysterious cube was cautiously raised from its resting-place.

With the huge magnet that had raised it, it was covered with sacking, and the whole was conveyed over the temporary rails across town to the nearest siding.

near Annapolis had had its foundations strengthened, and there the block of Id was deposited.

Two hundred yards from the magazine itself a strong fence was erected, and the barrier was guarded night and day by United States soldiery. Worthington expressed a desire to see it at close range, and the Navy Department readily granted the request.

I was to accompany him, and took on myself the responsibility of inviting Edith and her girl friend to meet us. Milly French's family was still with her uncle at Washington. I felt that she, too, had a right to behold the result of her uncle's years of labor.

A hoary-headed scientist attached to the National Museum at Washington provided passes and volunteered to conduct us. He undertook to convey us out to the magazine in his own automobile from the capitol.

Worthington was more than surprised to see Edith. His face flushed, and he glared at me balefully. The girl was distant with him, but seemed to share the pleasure I got from seeing her again, and my hopes rose high.

Her attitude toward her cousin was the reaction from the change in his manner toward her after their uncle's death, I divined.

"Some time to-day I shall make an opportunity to speak," I decided.

Worthington was almost rude to Edith's friend, which was decidedly boorish of him, for I found her a charming girl. He turned to Professor Bilkins, our guide.

"Why was such an out-of-the-way spot chosen to deposit our scientific curiosity?" he asked.

"Think, my dear sir," the scientist answered, "what would happen if that substance should suddenly disintegrate! You it was, I understand, who aptly termed the process that brought it into existence in its present form an inplosion. Suppose that process were to be reversed. What a terrific explosion that would cause—the sudden expansion of twenty tons of a solid,

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CONCLUSION.

A MONTH later it was before we learned through Brinckley what had become of the cube of Id. A disused powder magazine on government land

so dense that it now occupies just twenty-seven cubic inches of space, perhaps into a gas rarer than any yet known to science."

"Um! that's true," said Worthington. "I suppose none of your distinguished fellow scientists has tried anything that might cause such an explosion?"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed fervently. "But hundreds of scientists have looked and marveled, risking the possibility of its going off spontaneously. Even now there are deputations on the way to this country from all the capitals of the civilized world, specially sent by the learned bodies to which the members belong, merely to see what has been described and wildly speculated about in our own current scientific literature."

"Why don't you experiment with a chip of it?" I suggested.

Professor Bilkins eyed me with the utmost commiseration.

"Young man," he said, "I advise you to take up the study of elementary physics. The extraordinary density of the substance which our distinguished and late lamented fellow scientist, Professor Julian Erasmus Bull, has called Id, gives a hardness that nothing else known approaches. A diamond does not so much as scratch its surface. With what, then, would we attempt to chip it?"

I subsided; but smiled into Edith Deering's eyes.

"Your uncle is gladly hailed 'our distinguished fellow scientist,' where, formerly, he was all but ignored," I said.

The girl sighed, and the tears glistened on her lashes. I regretted my words.

Great was the amusement of the girls as we approached the magazine. As we passed through the gates there were the sentinels, posed in absurd attitudes, caused by the modification in the center of gravity induced by the near presence of Id.

We in turn had to adjust ourselves to the change, while the chauffeur, who evidently had been there before, clapped on his brakes as if going down-hill, which, to all intents and purposes, he was. He had the sense, too, not to approach too near the magazine, because if once the metal parts of the car had come within the magnetic field of the cube of Id, the machine would probably have been drawn against the wall of the building and held there indefinitely.

We got out and walked the rest of the way, having left in the car everything in our possession subject to magnetic attraction.

The sensation of going down-hill on level ground set the girls off into peals of laughter, which rather annoyed the grave Professor Bilkins. Their natural buoyancy was hushed to a certain degree of awe, however, when we gazed at close range upon the "greatest scientific discovery of any age," as our conductor grandiloquently described it.

The three-inch cube rested on a bed of solid granite below the level of the floor. I noted again the peculiar effect of translucence, though, as stated in an earlier chapter, the substance was absolutely opaque.

The same rose-tinted flame, apparently undulating constantly, that I had observed through the professor's magnifying-glass when we examined the smaller morsels of Id, was now evident to the naked eye. Nevertheless, Worthington produced a strong glass he had brought with him.

"Oh, let me, please!" cried Edith Deering, eager as a spoiled child.

Worthington relinquished the glass and the girl bent over the cube, close to which we stood.

She gasped and changed color. The magnifier dropped from her fingers and she looked up, her eyes round and her cheeks gone suddenly white.

"There's—there's a man in there," she cried hoarsely.

On impulse I picked up the glass

and studied the spot she had been examining, while the others leaned forward tensely.

"That is a curious feature of the formation that has been observed," remarked Professor Bilkins in a monotonous, dry-as-dust tone.

With growing fascination I studied the face in the cube. There could be no mistake, it was the face of a man.

The eyes were wide open, and, as I looked, I could have sworn I saw a flicker of recognition in them.

"Rupert Reaves!" I muttered hoarsely. "His soul as well as his body is imprisoned there!"

"Oh—Cousin Frank!" came a wail of horror from Edith.

My heart sank. Hope died within me. It was toward Worthington she turned in her moment of emotional upheaval, when all restraint was thrown aside. The next moment he was supporting her in his arms.

His eyes passed over her bent head and sought mine. Their expression was mixed—friendliness, commiseration, and triumph, and something else deeper than any of these. But it was not for me, that last.

I took the shocked Professor Bilkins by the sleeve and gave my other arm to Milly French, who, knowing nothing of Rupert Reaves and the tragedy that had imprisoned him in that curious cube of Id, was merely bewildered by the sudden turn events had taken.

"Come," I said, "let us return to the car."

In a few minutes Worthington and Edith followed us. Heedless of the others, my friend took my hand.

"Jim," he said, "we both want you to be best man!"

I hesitated. I was deeply wounded in my heart, and in my pride, and it was with difficulty I refrained from showing it.

"Oh, please say yes," Edith pleaded.

I looked into her eyes and could have refused her nothing.

"I will," I answered fervently, as I clasped their hands.

"And may you both be as happy as you deserve to be," I added.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Edith murmured, her eyes glistening.

She gave my hand a warm pressure, then turned to Milly French.

"Forgive me for not speaking first," she said, "but I know it goes without saying you will be my bridesmaid, dear," she said sweetly.

"Why, of course it does," said Milly warmly, and hugged her chum ecstatically.

"And where do I come in?" asked Professor Bilkins jocularly, entering into the spirit of the occasion.

"The very thing," cried Edith joyously. "You shall give away the bride! Oh, do say you will."

"Indeed it will be an honor, my dear young lady," he gravely agreed. "to represent your late uncle, our distinguished fellow scientist, on so momentous an occasion."

As we drove back to Washington Edith leaned toward me in the tonneau.

"You know what is expected of the best man and the bridesmaid," she whispered mischievously.

"Here—you two have got to stop having whispered confabs," Worthington jokingly admonished.

Edith tossed her head disdainfully, and I grinned into his face. Then I stole a glance at Edith's chum, sitting demurely beside me.

"By Jove! I might do a lot worse than Milly," was my inward decision.

"Give me time," I whispered to Edith.

"Just a month," she answered blushing. "Frank wouldn't hear of waiting a day longer."

Worthington had overheard that last remark, and his boyish face radiated joy and good humor.

He passed an arm furtively about the girl's waist, and she nestled closer to him.

# The Editor's Desk

**D**OUBTLESS a good many of you will wonder why I am making arrangements to get married in May instead of June. But, after all, when two personalities feel that they are indispensable to each other it is inadvisable to delay the alliance. And, moreover, who can resist a *Cavalier*? Obviously, having a heart and a sentimental tendency, there is no reason why I should not receive an offer of marriage from one whose social standing is quite equal to my own and whose future is assured.

Both *The Cavalier* and myself have long moved in the best intellectual society, and it is natural that, having come so frequently in contact, both having the same high ideals, both loving the same pastimes and enjoying the same recreations, to say nothing of the fact that we have long cultivated the same friends, we should unite and work out the full purposes of our lives hand in hand.

Therefore, my friends, I shall marry *The Cavalier* on the 16th of May. Hereafter we shall spend our week-ends with you, so prepare for our arrival Wednesday or Thursday, as the case may be. All we want is a little corner in your library by the old reading-lamp or in the hammock on your veranda.

We give always more than we receive. We will make your life happier. We will spread sunshine and contentment wherever we go, and as long as you live we will be your two favorite weekly visitors.

I refer to us as two, but as a matter of fact we are only one—a condition brought about through the perfect merging of two perfect entities. And so, as I said before, on the 16th of May we will take our handicap on the June brides and bridegrooms, and make this job complete.

I dare anybody to forbid the banns.

\* \* \* \*

Seriously, however, this amalgamation is the most important step in our mutual lives. The result will be a better, bigger, more comprehensive magazine, and instead of having our weekly house-warmings in different parts of the town, we will have them together, and all our friends can meet us at one central meeting-place instead of two. We are going to entertain more lavishly than ever this winter, have a greater variety of courses at each meal, and only the most celebrated artists will be employed to amuse our guests.

In the back of this number of the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* you will find two serial stories from *The Cavalier*. Another one starts in the issue of the 9th, which makes three altogether. In both the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* and *The Cavalier* there will be a sum total of six serial stories. These will be carried over simultaneously on the 16th, in which number they will be brought to a close, after which the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* and *The Cavalier* will appear as one inseparable, indivisible, complete, whole, healthy magazine.

Tell your friends about it, give us your support, stand by us, and we will all be happy forever afterward.

Anybody who has seen Lorado Taft's statue of the American Indian, arms folded, gazing fearlessly over the countryside where he once ambushed the paleface and held his nightly vigils by the light of the roaring camp-fire, or, dancing around to the melancholy throbs of a hollow log drum, worked

himself into a frenzy to kill his savage foeman, will like

## RED WAMPUM

by J. Earl Clauson, which appears in the ALL-STORY next week.

Here he will meet the primitive red-skin, stripped to the waist and covered with beads and scalps. Here he will glimpse rough New England villages and Indian encampments, vivid pictures of such old historical personages as Roger Williams and King Philip's lieutenants. The London of Charles II's time and his riotous court will be held up for his minute survey; trappers and dice-throwers and duelists will pass before his mind's eye.

And La Belle Coloniale, the charming half-American, half-English girl, and the heroine of Mr. Clauson's story, will curtsy and extend her hand to be kissed. A real American story is Mr. Clauson's, breathing the spell of the forest and bristling with the terrors of the trails. Like "THE GATES OF THE WEST," whose last instalment appeared a week or so ago, it has a distinctly patriotic appeal.

The new serial,

## THE MINGLING OF THE WATERS

which starts next week, was originally announced for April 25; but, for one reason or another, we were unable to publish it at that time.

The story is at last forthcoming. We needn't expatiate upon its merits, seeing that we have already done so in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of April 25. We will say that Mr. Hamby has written a delightful story about a young man who is a good business man and a good lover, and a young woman who isn't certain whether she is merely a backwoods girl or a society belle—until she falls in love.

Then she finds out, and the manner in which she does it makes an interesting tale.

### Mad at the Mad King

INDEPENDENCE, Oregon.

THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

DEAR OLD ALL-STORY:

I am writing to let you know how very much peeved I am at the way Edgar Rice Burroughs ended his story "The Mad King." It seems to be Mr. Burroughs's delight to give all of his stories a very insipid ending and to give his heroes the worst of the deal.

In the story "The Mad King," he sends the American home without the girl he loves when he could have done as his father did, namely, to elope with the *Princess Emma*.

It was a shame for Custer to leave the country without *Emma*, as he knew that she had refused the *king's* offer of his crown. It seems to me that Mr. Burroughs could have let the hero take his lady-love with him instead of leaving her to pine away in what we presume was solitude and tears all of her days.

Let us hope Mr. Burroughs will change his style of ending his stories and not disappoint us any more, as he is a good author when he tries to give a good ending to his stories.

R. O. C.

### An American King

SAVANNAH, Georgia.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY,  
New York, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:

I have just finished reading "The Mad King"; it was sure some story, but the end was on the hog.

I would like to know if Mr. E. R. Burroughs is going to continue it and make the American king.

Hoping to receive an answer in the form of a good, ripping story, I am,

R. A. M.

### After the Portcullis

BROOKLYN, New York.

MY DEAR MR. EDITOR:

Considering that *ma femme et moi* gobbled Mr. Burroughs's "Mad King" at a sitting, it couldn't have been half bad, even if Hawkins *did* write it first, and it's a dirty, Hibernian trick to enjoy a man's work and then knock him, but we have a "Horse on Burroughs"—or rather, another tiger.

Not once only, but a round half-dozen times did Mr. Burroughs insist that a portcullis was something that could be walked on, stood upon, rolled over on, and generally danced a jig upon, just like the more common, ordinary, comparatively unpicturesque word "drawbridge" might be; but not so—not so.

As Mr. B. may by chance write another story some time dealing in castles, old or new, let him scan the pages of his unabridged and learn that a portcullis is a barred grating that does a sort of guilotine-like drop through perpendicular grooves in the side of the arched entrance to which the drawbridge leads, and blocks the gateway for ingress or egress.

You remember our boyhood-friend *Marmion* had a close scrape from being eel-speared on one—

"To pass he had such scanty room  
The bars, descending, grazed his plume—"

"Bar"-ring this little insistent slip, and the usual Burroughsian run of horse-luck by which his heroes are always "Johnny on the Spot" at the psychic moment when the villain does a monologue act and rehearses his plans in full, or some such considerate attention occupies him—we enjoyed the tale to the full.

Cordially, H. M. E.

#### A Wise Englishman

WINNIPEG, Canada.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have just completed reading your ALL-STORY WEEKLY of March 14, and I must say right here that it was the best book of yarns I have read this side of the water. About two months ago I quit reading a certain American book which I had been reading for four months.

Well, I absolutely got fed right up to my neck with disgust, as in nearly every number there appeared a tale wherein the Englishman was a fool and *always* the American was a wise man. Well, sir, as I said, I got fed up, and so I had to send to the old country for my reading matter.

A fellow told me (an Englishman also) to try the ALL-STORY, and the first tale I read was a spanking fine yarn of London, England, entitled "Midnight in Wimbledon Terrace." And, believe me, I was really sorry when I had finished the tale. It was a tale, too.

There was no silly rot about the English fool and the American wise man. I guess it's only natural in an American book, but, hang it all, why the dickens can't they write the same sort of yarns as your "Midnight in Wimbledon Terrace."

I will finish now, trusting that your book gets the success it really deserves. I assure you I will buy it every week.

Trusting I can read your ALL-STORY for a good, long time to come,

Yours very truly,  
A. E. M.

#### Another Weekly Fan

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have often wanted to write and tell you how I enjoy your magazine. I think Mr. Burroughs is the best writer you have. I also like Mr. Clauson for his work in "The Outsider." I bought a copy of it and think it is the best story I ever read.

"Tarzan of the Apes" is a very good story, so are "The Brain Blight," "The Cave Girl," "The Woman of the Pyramid," "Barstow's Wife," "A Man Without a Soul," "The House of Sorcery," "The Copper Princess," and "The Eternal Lover."

I am not a subscriber for reasons that I travel a good deal, and change my address often, but I do not miss a copy. Now that it will be a weekly I will like it all the better, because I could hardly wait till I got one, I enjoy it so much.

Hoping for more stories like "The Outsider," I remain,

A. P.

#### A Correspondence Club

BROOKLYN, New York.

TO THE EDITOR, A.-S. W.

DEAR SIR:

Through an introduction in the ALL-STORY MAGAZINE my cousin and I have been corresponding with a young gentleman in England. Now we wish to have others among our number and to form an ALL-STORY Correspondence Club to exchange opinions on our stories in the A.-S. W.

Can we ask you to publish this letter with the following names and addresses:

Harry J. Marx, 1244 Bushwick Avenue,  
Brooklyn, New York.

Fred R. Sauer, 599 Central Avenue,  
Brooklyn, New York.

Charles Gregory, 551 Liverpool Street,  
Seedley, Manchester, England.

We are three young men, average/21 years of age, and would enjoy corresponding with any reader of the A.-S. in different parts of the world. Appreciating anything you may do to forward our plans, I remain,

Sincerely,

H. J. M.



This story begins this week in THE CAVALIER. Our reason for carrying it in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is that you may have the opening chapters, and thus be able to go on with it when the ALL-STORY and THE CAVALIER are combined with the May 16th issue.

# THE GRAND GETAWAY

BY A. H. C. MITCHELL

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SOUVENIR STICKPINS.

ON May 25 George Benjamin Carteret and James Benjamin Carteret, twins, were winning a ball game for their alma mater in a small New England town.

These two young men, in their senior year, formed one of the most remarkable batteries that ever graced a college diamond, for this cogent reason: Both could pitch or catch equally well, and it was their habit to shift positions in a game whenever they felt like it, or the exigencies of the particular case seemed to require.

The game was important, from an undergraduate standpoint, and the twins had covered themselves with dust and glory. George Carteret had just scored at the end of the eighth when his brother pushed a single to right. He was at the water-tanks when a messenger handed him a telegram. Tearing it open with sweating fingers he read:

Your father died suddenly this morning. Come at once.

The telegram was dated from San Francisco, and signed by their father's attorney.

That night the Carteret twins left for San Francisco.

The twins were fine, upstanding fellows, approaching their twenty-third year. Each was exactly six feet, one-half inch tall, and the beam quivered at 190 whenever either one of them stepped on the scales after a shower-bath. For three years they had been the main battery of their college nine, and for three years they had played guard on the eleven. They were clever boxers.

In addition to their triumphs afield, the twins wrote, composed, rehearsed and produced the annual college scream. They were, in fact, remarkably clever musicians.

Their family affairs always had been most peculiar. On the death of their mother during their infancy, they had been placed in the care of an aunt who lived near Boston. Their father's home always had been in California, and they saw him only on his infrequent visits East. But he always had been generous with them, and they believed him to be fairly well off.

Speeding westward, in answer to the telegram, gloom upon their souls, the thought of an adventure, however mild, was far from the minds of the Carteret twins. But at Omaha they met their adventure, which didn't amount to much, certainly, yet months later they had reason to thank their lucky stars that they had taken part in it.

Killing an hour's time in making connections, they watched a through train roll in from the west. The colored porters descended and placed their little footstools on the ground. From one of the coaches came two young women, hand in hand, laughing gaily. The first stepped lightly to the track level, but the other, ignoring the porter's outstretched hand, jumped from the last step, turned an ankle and crumpled to the ground.

The Carteret twins were not ten feet distant when it happened. In an instant they were assisting her to arise. She smiled faintly.

"How stupid of me. Thank you both very much," she said. "I'll be all right as soon as I stop seeing stars.

I guess I'd better get back on the train. Edith, where's father?"

"In the smoking compartment playing cards, I suppose," returned the other girl. It was easy to see they were sisters. The first attempted to walk, wavered and clutched wildly at the young men.

"Why, I'm helpless, and I can feel my ankle swelling, and it hurts awfully!" she complained, half between a laugh and a cry.

The twins made a simultaneous movement, but George, on the left, was in the better position. He slipped one arm around her waist, the other around her knees, and lifted her from the ground as though she were a little child.

"Only one thing to be done," he said, stepping aboard the train. "What section, please?"

"The drawing-room, right here. Thank you so much. I'm an awful bother," said the injured girl.

George placed her on the couch and arranged a pillow under her head as the other girl crowded into the state-room with his brother.

"Now, I'm the family doctor here," said George with businesslike authority, "and you will all obey orders on pain of death. Jim, we've got fifteen minutes to spare. Run out and get a paper bucket, fill it a third full of water, and put a chunk of ice in it. And, say, Jim, a small bottle of arnica.

"Now, when he gets back," turning to the other young woman, "take off her shoe and stocking—wait, I'll take her shoe off now while I'm about it—take off her stocking and plump her foot right in the cold water and let it stay there for an hour. Get some more ice from the porter when the first piece melts. Bandage the foot in arnica and don't let her try to walk to the dining-car. The main thing is to keep the ankle quiet."

"You talk like a regular doctor. Are you one?" asked the other girl.

"No, but I know all about sprained ankles."

"Well, it's awfully kind of you, and I will follow directions to the letter. Does it hurt much now, Helen?"

"The pain is a little easier, but the ankle burns like a coal of fire," replied the girl on the couch. "You men certainly work fast."

Jim was back quickly, and after George had repeated instructions they

started to go, but Helen beckoned George to her side. As he stooped over her and held out his hand she drew a stickpin from the dinky little four-in-hand she wore and fastened it in his tie.

"It was so kind of you to take all this trouble," she said in a low voice, "and I want you to have this pin to remember us by. Edith, don't be so stingy." But the other girl's hand was already taking the pin from her tie, and she smilingly placed it in the black cravat worn by Jim.

Half an hour later the twins were rolling westward once more. They had lighted cigarettes in the smoking compartment before either spoke. Then George said:

"That Helen is a mighty pretty girl."

"She hasn't got anything on Edith," replied Jim.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VOICE THROUGH THE WALL.

EARLY in June there appeared in San Francisco a well-dressed, slightly built man of thirty, seeking whom he might financially devour. He was a get-rich-quick operator, not of the rapid-fire, flimflam variety, but rather of the old school which usually works silently, alone and at night.

He had a string of aliases as long as the pedigree of a prize-winning Jersey bull, but he used none of them in undertaking the adventure unfolded in this narrative. Instead, he picked out what he considered a fancy, yet conservative, name — Archibald Norval Hemenway, and Mr. Hemenway was the possessor of seven hundred and fifteen dollars. He counted his money over carefully and then delivered to himself the following ultimatum:

"Archie, you'll live on a hundred a month, and if you don't make a strike before the roll's gone you'll quit the business."

From the city directory he made a list of certain places he had in mind, and spent the rest of the day looking up every address on his list. Finally he checked off one that seemed to suit his fancy. Next he selected a quiet little room in a quiet house in a quiet street and had his trunk sent there.

In the morning he went back to the address he had checked off and hired

an office, signing a year's lease without hesitancy. The building where he had located was some distance from the center of the business district. It was on a corner, and the ground floor was occupied by a small bank, while the rooms above were mostly taken by real estate men active in that neighborhood.

Hemenway bought a cheap rug that all but covered the floor of his office, and on it he placed a flat top desk with side drawers. Around the room he strung several cheap pine tables, and on the tables he scattered a number of useless blue prints.

In short, he arranged his office with a view of impressing the casual visitor with the idea that he was a man of business. As a matter of fact, these things, with the possible exception of the rug, had nothing whatever to do with the affair that he had in mind.

This done, he called in the janitor of the building and said:

"This is my workshop and I don't want any of these things disturbed. I don't even want my office swept or dusted. I don't care anything about the appearance of this room, as none of my business friends come to see me. I go to see them.

"When the room gets too dirty for comfort I'll let you know and we'll clean up. So don't disturb anything, and here's a couple of dollars so you won't forget it."

Hemenway immediately established the custom of leaving his office at eleven o'clock every morning, returning at night for work. For a while this work consisted principally in making a lot of figures on many sheets of paper. This gave him an opportunity of thinking out certain details of his proposed operation. At times he thought aloud, always firmly pressing the left pedal, something like this:

"I can see right now this job will be a pipe. I can round it up in jig time, but the getaway bothers me. It would be the easiest kind of a cinch if I was working with a gang, but that kind of working doesn't suit little Willie. Some one always gets nabbed and some one always squeals. Besides, you have to divvy with a gang.

"No, sir, I'll stick to first principles; whole hog or none with me. They may get me some time, but they haven't got me yet. If I can make my getaway on this job I'll be fixed

for life. But the getaway—the getaway—" and so his thoughts ran on.

He cogitated over plan after plan, only to cast them aside one after the other as unavailable. He pondered in his office, on the street, and in his bed at night until the thing began to get on his nerves. Suddenly there came a solution of his problem from a most unexpected quarter.

The day after the funeral of their father the Carteret twins found themselves in the office of the lawyer who had sent the telegram calling them to San Francisco. From him they learned that their father had lived up to the handle all his life and had left hardly enough to pay his debts.

It was necessary for the young men to find means of support without delay. Strangers in a strange land, they had never felt more helpless in their lives. Their college baseball fame had spread to the coast, and if they had only realized it they could have signed up with a ball club in jig time at good money. But the idea never occurred to them.

It was quite by accident that they stumbled on a new theater upon which workmen were putting the finishing touches. There were many indications that it was to be far from a first-class house. Flaring three-sheets announced that it was to be a continuous vaudeville, and that the opening was fixed for three days hence.

Taking a dying chance, they sought the manager and applied for a job as piano players. Considerably to their surprise they got it. It took them about three minutes to demonstrate their ability, and about three more to make a deal with the manager, who was hard pressed.

The twins signed for twenty-one dollars apiece a week. It was to be watch and watch, twelve hour a day, from eleven to eleven. They promised themselves this would do very well until they got their heads above water. They hired a room up-town, but had hardly settled down before they found themselves on the eve of a strange adventure.

With his face in the soap suds one morning it suddenly occurred to the Jim twin that they might do something in the musical line and make some money out of it. He mentioned the fact to his brother.

"All right, I'm game," said George. "Spiel away."

"I'll confess I can't come across right on the spur of the moment," replied Jim. "Give me a little time and I'll hand you something."

It was Jim's late trick that night, and when he reached home George was peacefully sleeping. Tearing off the bedclothes, he shook George by the shoulders.

"Wake up!" he cried; "I got yer. Arabian Nights, Barber's fifth brother. Never been touched. Great stuff. Guy has a bag full of silver—"

George held up one hand, while he rubbed his eyes with the other.

"Just a moment, just a moment, Mr. Alfred Jingle. You seem very much perturbed. Now that you've got me awake"—he reached for a cigarette—"you might let me know what you are driving at."

"Why, the comic opera!" exclaimed Jim with great animation. "I've got the whole scheme all laid out. Listen to this."

Forthwith he unfolded a scenario. As he warmed to his subject he punctuated his talk with a step or two and with ta-ra-ra music where he thought it would do the most good. George consumed four cigarettes while Jim held forth. When the curtain finally fell, amid deafening applause—on the part of Jim—his brother said:

"Very good. It listens all right, Jim, and I'm perfectly willing to trail along with you, but, my dear boy, it takes time to do this thing properly. Where could we find time with both of us busy, you might say, from eleven to eleven, seven days a week?"

"We found time in college, didn't we?"

"That was an amateur stunt. This is a different proposition altogether. It takes time and care to put such a thing in shape to sell for real money. Why, we couldn't do the thing properly unless we were off by ourselves for six months, at the very least."

Jim's face fell forty degrees. "I guess you are right," he said. "If we only had money enough to chuck this job and go at the thing right, we could deliver the goods. You know we could. How are you fixed? It's a foolish question!"

"About a hundred and ten," said George.

"Same here. Gee! if we only had a

little schooner we could beat it to the South Sea Islands. I guess every time a man wants to write a comic opera he thinks of the South Sea Islands. There's a feeling that one could lay off there and just loll 'round and turn out the finest kind of stuff. You know I would take a chance of handling a schooner alone—we two—but what's the use of talking, we ain't got no boat, as the fellow said."

"And we ain't got no money," said George.

There was a pause. Then, apparently from nowhere, came a voice.

"Can you navigate?" asked the voice very clearly and very distinctly.

The twins looked at each other. "We can," both answered together.

"Wait a minute," said the voice. Ten seconds later there came a knock on the door, and there entered, in bathrobe and slippers, Mr. Archibald Norval Hemenway.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A DREAM COMES TRUE.

HEMENWAY introduced himself without delay, and in turn the twins made themselves known to him. The newcomer glanced around the room.

There were half a dozen baseballs, gilded and inscribed, trophies of the college diamond. There were an old football, several flags, a few rugs, and seven or eight sofa-pillows slung around the room in that devil-may-care way called artistic.

The newcomer declined a cigarette, but accepted a chair. George, in his pajamas, on the edge of his bed, and Jim, in his shirt sleeves, apologized for their appearance.

"I owe the apologies for this midnight visit in this unconventional costume," replied Hemenway. "As you might have guessed, I occupy the next room to you, and through that connecting door I couldn't help listening to that dress-rehearsal—in fact, you woke me up."

"Now, please don't say a word, I was only half asleep, anyway. But, speaking of your dress-rehearsal, it was very interesting"—he bowed and smiled—"and it ought to make a hit. I ought to be a good judge, for I spent a good many years knocking around New York, and took in all the shows

visible to the naked eye. But I'm not an impresario; therefore I cannot offer you any advance royalties. However, if you care to listen to a proposition, I think I can help you in an indirect way. It may not appeal to you," and he looked at the twins inquiringly.

"Speaking for the firm, I think any old proposition would appeal to us," said the Jim twin. "Please go ahead with it."

"The whole thing hinges on your knowledge of navigation," continued Hemenway. "Did I understand you to say you could navigate? Could you sail a boat from here to—Honolulu, for example?"

"Sure," replied George, "either one of us could do it."

"Not to be too inquisitive, may I ask how you acquired this knowledge? I don't want to cast any reflections, but you don't look like deep-water sailors."

"We don't, that's a fact," acknowledged Jim, examining the palms of his hands, "but we have had considerable experience, just the same. We were raised in the East and went to college there. We were just crazy for the water, and spent our vacations cruising around."

"One summer we went to the Azores on a sailing vessel from Boston. Another year we went to the West Indies. We spent three months a year ago on a coasting schooner. One of the first things we learned was navigation. We know the ropes all right. Now, what's on your mind?"

"Well, the idea is just this," replied Hemenway, settling down in his chair. "I've got to get away from here for my health mighty soon. My doctor tells me a long sea voyage is the very best thing that could happen to me. Stay away six months or a year, he says."

"I've just been dreaming of the South Sea Islands. Don't know a thing about 'em, but fancy they would hit me right. I believe I will take a cigarette if it kills me. My doctor tells me to leave them alone, but I'm getting excited—thanks—Now you were talking about the South Sea Islands a minute ago. I wasn't trying to listen, but you spoke rather loudly, you know, and I just couldn't help it. Here's the scheme:

"I must say right here that I'm not John D. or J. Pierpont, but I'll tell you

what I can do. I can furnish a small schooner and fit her out for a year, but I cannot afford to pay wages to a captain, bosun, or whatever you call him, cook and crew for that length of time. But if you will boss the job between you, I think we can dig up a crew of young fellows, including myself, who would make the trip for the fun of the thing.

"There must be a million islands down there, to judge by the looks of the map. We'll just pick out a small one and lay off there as long as you like. You can have all the time to write your stuff and no one will bother you. As for me, I will be following the doctor's orders."

"There are many details yet to be considered; I have simply given you the outline of my scheme. Can it be worked? If it can, it is up to you to say if you care to go through with it. How about you?"

The answer came quick enough. George rolled back on the bed and kicked his heels in the air—a most undignified action for a supposedly more or less cultured college man. Jim strode over to Hemenway and grasped him by the hand.

"Mr. Hemenway, you have saved our lives," he said heartily. "We will throw up our positions, such as they are, in a minute and take a chance with you; eh, George?"

"Bet your life!" laughed George. "Say, Mr. Hemenway, how soon can we pull up anchor?"

"Well, Mr. Carteret, there's the trifling matter of getting a boat to begin with, and then the equally trifling matter of fitting her out. You ought to know more about those things than I do. The whole thing is sudden with me, I assure you. It would never have occurred if I hadn't overheard your talk to-night. Now, then, let's go over this matter calmly."

Hemenway was a clever talker and the twins were very enthusiastic. They discussed the scheme until daylight began to show through the window curtains. At last Hemenway rose to go, and this is what he said at parting:

"Now, it is understood that I will get the crew. It is also understood that you are to say nothing of this matter to a soul. I have hinted that there are certain personal reasons for my wishing to keep the thing quiet."

"I will arrange the whole business, and all you have to do is to hold yourselves in readiness to leave on short notice. We are right handy to each other here, and I will keep you posted as to my progress. Good night!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

ALL ABOUT ONE BANANA SKIN.

**H**EMENWAY was working on a shoestrings and his nerve. The money he had with him was only a flea-bite. His credit was no better than a newsboy's in a candy store. But he had confidence that his ability, which was quite remarkable in certain directions, would carry him through.

So, snatching a few hours' sleep, he dressed himself with great care and was ready for a day's work that would test his ingenuity to the limit. From his trunk he selected two letter-heads and envelopes bearing the imprint of the Hotel Belgrade, New York. These he placed in his pocket and jumped on a car headed down-town.

On the way down he drew from his pocket a newspaper clipping, and to make sure he had not overlooked anything reread the following:

NEW YORK, June 2.—Mark Makepiece Marriott and his daughters, Edith and Helen, of San Francisco, came within an ace of being left behind when the Mauretania, on which they had booked passage, sailed this noon. They were the last passengers to board the steamship, and they only made connections after the hardest kind of a sprint. It is doubtful if they have yet recovered their wind.

A banana skin caused all the trouble. Said banana skin lay for twenty-eight seconds on the edge of the southeast corner of Broadway and Forty-Second Street, and got in the news of the day before the white-wing responsible for the street cleanliness of the immediate vicinity could gather it into the receptacle provided for that purpose by the city of New York.

Mr. Marriott left his hotel to make an eleventh-hour purchase this morning. At the aforesaid corner his left foot slipped on the aforesaid banana skin. His right foot immediately connected with the anatomy of a large negro, who jumped two feet in the air and let out an ear-splitting yell.

This scared a cab-horse from a peaceful doze into a runaway. Before the horse was bowled over by a passing automobile a block away there was an incipient riot at Broadway and Forty-Second, with Mr. Marriott the storm-center. The blockade lasted twenty minutes and tied up traffic for a mile in every direction.

Mr. Marriott and the negro, who gave his name as George Jackson, of Memphis, Tennessee, seemed to be the handiest to arrest, and they were taken to the police station in a patrol-wagon. It required an hour of Mr. Marriott's time, the giving of his pedigree and the display of his steamship tickets before he was allowed to depart.

In the mean time his daughters were nearly frantic. Mr. Marriott hustled back to his hotel, and the three made a dash for the steamship pier. Mr. Marriott's eleventh-hour purchase was not made.

In a paragraph under this despatch was an explanatory note which said that Marriott and his daughters had closed their house and left San Francisco on May 25 for an extended pleasure trip.

Going to the office of the newspaper which had printed this despatch, Hemenway asked for the Sunday editor, and when the benign old gentleman who presided over that department appeared offered to give him the tip on a fine "story" in a few days, if in return he might be allowed to examine the clippings in the office relating to Mark Makepiece Marriott. After some parley the deal was made.

"I am a cousin of his," explained Hemenway. "I am just from the East and I want to see how he stands out here."

An envelope containing about thirty clippings relating to Marriott was passed to Hemenway. Most of the slips told about big land deals, but Hemenway was able to learn these facts: Marriott was a widower, about fifty years old, and had two daughters, Edith and Helen, nineteen and twenty-one years of age, respectively.

He had come from the East when a young man, and had made a fortune speculating in timber lands. In the envelope there was also a picture of him, clipped from a lumber trade journal.



Hemenway then borrowed the use of a typewriter over in the corner of the room and, placing a Hotel Belgrade letter-head in the machine, laboriously wrote the following letter to himself:

NEW YORK, June 1.

MY DEAR ARCHIE:

I hope you arrived safely in San Francisco, and that you will be successful in your business undertaking. When I return doubtless I will be able, with my line of friends, to help you not a little. I wish we could have seen more of you here in New York, but I realize that business is business.

I have just received a long letter from a business associate in Seattle which knocks my plans for a pleasure trip into a cocked-hat, but it is against my nature to let a big pot of money slip by, and I'm not going to do it, either, and this leads up to something I want you to do for me. It is an important matter, so please get right after it. I trust to your good judgment. It is this:

Charter or buy—if it looks like a bargain—a small schooner yacht, suitable for cruising, say about seventy-five feet long; well built, but nothing fancy. I shall want to use her five or six months this year and a whole lot next season. Have her stocked with a year's supplies and have her ready to sail not later than July 15. The girls have inveigled me into making a short trip to the other side, but we'll not stay there more than two weeks. I have already booked return passage, and we will all be in San Francisco again by July 15.

You will find my credit is good in San Francisco. Have any one you deal with look me up in Bradstreet's. You O. K. the bills and they can have their money as soon as I get back home. If it becomes really necessary, cable me, care Baring's, London, and I will arrange for cabling funds, but I hardly think this will be necessary. I would suggest that you buy everything needed through one firm, if possible, after getting your estimates, of course. This is sent off hurriedly, and I am trusting to your good sense in all the details.

Of course, I want you to go along, if you can arrange matters. The whole thing is a business proposition, in which I see a good deal of money. I'll not tell you the nature of it until I see

you, but I need the vessel to make certain investigations I couldn't make otherwise, unless I chartered a steamship. Do your best on this. Tell any people you deal with to keep my name quiet.

The girls send love, and hoping you are well and happy, I remain,

Very sincerely your cousin,

M. M. MARRIOTT.

Hemenway used his fountain pen to sign this letter, imitating as well as he could a facsimile signature he found among the clippings. He folded the letter carefully and put it away. He then drew another slip from his pocket. It was an advertisement clipped from a newspaper and read:

**FOR SALE**—Schooner Yacht Run-away, 71 feet o.a., 54 feet l.w.l.; 16.5 feet beam, 7½ feet draft. Extra heavy construction; stateroom, saloon, 7 berths; commodious galley; fo'c's'le for four men. Unusually complete inventory, mostly all new. Launch tender, tows yacht four knots an hour. Fine sea-boat and tight as a drum. Cruised to Puget's Sound last season. Owner anxious to sell. Apply to my agents, Anderson & Brownlow, ship-chandlers.

"Fine name for that boat," said Hemenway to himself. "Now, then, if I can put this one over the trick is as good as turned."

#### CHAPTER V.

"SHE LOOKS GOOD TO ME!"

ANDERSON & BROWNLOW conducted an establishment on the water-front. They also picked up considerable loose change as yacht brokers, and maintained up the bay a basin for the laying-up of yachts not in commission. Hemenway drove to their office in a taxicab and got hold of Anderson right away. Producing the clipping he said:

"Where is she and how much?"

"Up in the basin." He whispered the price in Hemenway's ear as though it was a particularly confidential matter.

"Let's have a look at her."

"Get aboard," and Anderson indicated a speed-launch that chafed against a landing pier a short distance

away. Hemenway went all over the yacht like a veterinary examining a horse for soundness. On the return trip he said:

"Well, Mr. Anderson, she looks pretty good to me, but I'm no yachtsman. I'll get a friend of mine who knows all about these things to look her over, and if he says O. K., I will consider the matter further. As a matter of fact, I'm not buying for myself and want to be careful not to make a mistake. Besides, I want to look at some other vessels."

Anderson waited until they had tied up the launch and then got down to business.

"Who are you buying for?" he asked.

"A cousin of mine," replied Hemenway, "and you know how relatives are. If you get the worst of it trying to do them a favor they won't speak to you for a year."

"What's his name?"

Hemenway hesitated. Then he said: "I might as well tell you, although I'm not supposed to—Mark Marriott. Know him?"

"Know him!" exclaimed Anderson—"I've known him for twenty years."

"You wouldn't know him now," retorted Hemenway, taking a chance; "he's shaved off his whiskers."

"He might lose his whiskers, but he'll never lose his money," observed the ship-chandler. Hemenway felt easier.

"What does he want of a schooner-yacht, anyway? He never went in for those kind of things. Must be getting gay in his old age," continued Anderson.

Hemenway allowed himself to scowl slightly. He replied:

"I shouldn't have mentioned his name at all. Not that it makes any difference to me personally, but he doesn't seem to want to have anything said about it. I guess I overstepped my orders."

Anderson hastened to square matters. "Now, don't you worry about that," he said quickly. "I'll keep my mouth shut. I want to do business with you, Mr. Hemenway. That schooner is the best bargain on the coast. Send along all the experts you want to. They'll all say the same."

Hemenway thought it the proper time to make a play. He jingled some coins in his pocket and looked off in

the distance. After a time he faced Anderson and said:

"Look here, Mr. Anderson, Marriott's name shouldn't have been mentioned at this stage of the game, but as long as you know it and have promised not to let it go any further, and also, because you say you know my cousin, I'll just tell you what I'm up against. Here, read this."

He fumbled in his pocket, drew out the letter he had written to himself, and passed it to Anderson, who put on his specs, read it, and handed it back with a nod.

"Now you know as much about this thing as I do," said Hemenway. "What's the best way to go about this? Give me some advice."

"I'm your man," declared Anderson heartily. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take this whole business off your hands, after you have satisfied yourself that the Runaway is the boat you want to buy—and I have no doubt of that, as I know every boat on the coast. I'll fit out the schooner with a year's supplies and see that everything is in shipshape, and all you and Marriott will have to do is step aboard and sail away."

Hemenway looked Anderson squarely in the eye. It was only by the exercise of great will-power that he was able to refrain from laughing. He pinched himself in the back before he would venture a reply. Finally he said earnestly:

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Anderson, but I must get the right prices on everything. You know how Marriott would holler. What would be your charge for this service?"

"Make out your list," proposed Anderson. "I'll help you, because I know a great deal more about these things than you do. Then you take the list and get your own figures. I'll guarantee to meet any prices you get and still make my commission. Besides, I will get my brokerage from the sale of the Runaway."

"Well, that's fair," said Hemenway, after taking a turn or two on the wharf. He didn't want to appear to hurry. He pondered for the effect on Anderson, but his thoughts were really racing away. At last he faced the other and said:

"I guess we can consider it settled. However, just to ease my mind, I will have a friend of mine look the

schooner over. I have no doubt he will agree with you that she is well worth the money. When that is done we will draw up a little memorandum and sign it, so that Marriott will see that I have done everything shipshape. Now, then, let's get at that list of supplies."

For an hour they struggled with the problem of what was needed. Hemenway got away at last, and when he was out of sight of Anderson he leaned against a building, took off his hat, and passed his hand through his hair.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "I must be dreaming. Things are coming too easy. Something tells me I will get an awful jolt before long. Well, I must see that I land first, that's all."

"I hate to bunco Anderson. He's a good old scout. If I make my strike he won't lose anything, but he'll have to do an awful lot of worrying, that's all. Business is business, and I can't afford to let any raw-boned old sport like Anderson stand between me and a whole lot of money."

Hemenway was no disciple of Job. He came out of his soliloquy and began to rush to completion the plans he had started so well for himself.

He got his quotations on the supplies and sent them to Anderson. That night he arranged with one of the twins to look over the Runaway the following day. Then he put on his hat and went out to hunt up a crew.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DARKNESS AND INDECISION.

**I**N one of the small parks of San Francisco that night a young man sat on a bench, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, his collar turned up, his felt hat drawn over his eyes. To judge from his clothes and what could be seen of his features, his condition in life was on a somewhat higher plane than that of the other men who swarmed the park.

At nine o'clock Mr. Archibald Hemenway entered this park and walked slowly through it. Returning, he flung himself on the bench occupied by the young man in the soft felt hat.

"He's either in love or in trouble," thought Hemenway, after eying him for some minutes; "I'll tap him." If the young man was aware of the new-

comer's presence he gave no indication of it.

"Fine night, isn't it?" observed Hemenway.

The young man turned his head slowly, looked at Hemenway for a moment, and resumed his former pose.

"I say it's a fine night," repeated Hemenway.

The young man gave his neighbor another look and scowled. "Suppose it is, I can't help it," he replied testily.

"Now, now, don't get fussy. What's the matter—down on your luck?"

The other hesitated, then drew himself up, squared around to Hemenway, and almost smiled. "My luck is all right, so far," he said; "I'm down on myself, that's all."

"Don't mind a little thing like that," said Hemenway jovially; "give me the luck and I'll take chances on myself any time. I'll tell you something," and Hemenway plunged into what he considered an essay on the art of being cheerful. "Now, I don't want you to tell me the story of your life," he concluded, "nor am I going to weary you with the story of my life, but I will just mention the fact that I am junior partner of the firm of Cheeryble Brothers."

"Never heard of them," remarked the young man indifferently. "Is their place of business in this town?"

"Well, I represent them here just now, but I'm going to establish a branch office in the South Sea Islands. Want to go along?"

The young man started violently and bent his eyes on Hemenway in a kind of wild stare. Then he smiled feebly. "If I didn't know you were giving me a fairy tale, I would say 'Yes,'" he replied after a pause. "I was just dreaming of the South Sea Islands when you came along and disturbed me."

"Except in a few unimportant details there is no fairy tale about it," replied Hemenway. "Now, you say you are down on yourself. Here's a chance to get it out of your system. I am going to the South Sea Islands very soon. Although I only saw you for the first time ten minutes ago, I hereby invite you to go along—under certain conditions. I'm a pretty good judge of human nature."

The young man thrust his hands deep in his pockets again and resumed his former dejected pose. He thought

intently for a few minutes. At length he faced Hemenway and said:

"When are you going, how are you going, and what are the conditions?"

Hemenway assumed the air of a man trying to sell another man a bill of goods. "Here's the situation," he said. "I am in poor health. My doctor tells me a trip to a tropical climate is best for what ails me. I've got a schooner-yacht and a little money, but I can't afford to pay wages to a captain and crew for a long trip like this.

"Have a cigar? No? I carry a few around but don't smoke myself. Now, then, in order to take this trip I've got to dig up a crew of young fellows that will make the trip for the fun of the thing. I don't want any rough-necks.

"We will all live in the cabin together, cook our own grub, and only do enough work to keep the schooner sailing in the right direction. A couple of friends of mine, who know all about yachts and navigation, will go along, to run things. We need two more—yourself, if you'll go along, and another.

"Sing high, sing low, wherever we go, We all shall equal be."

"When do you start?"

"In about two weeks."

"Can't you make it sooner?"

"Not very well—why?"

"Oh, if I'm going at all I want to go right away and be done with it."

"Any entangling alliances?"

"One. That's the reason I'm in a hurry."

"Maybe we can get away in a week or ten days; I'll see what can be done. What's your name?"

"Jim."

"That won't do—we've got one Jim aboard."

"Joseph's my middle name."

"That's better. Where can I reach you?"

"Right here to-morrow night at nine o'clock."

"What are you so fussy about?"

"Can you blame me? I'm sitting here alone on a bench, a stranger comes along and invites me to take a sea trip to God knows where! It listens all right, my friend, but I came originally from Missouri."

Hemenway laughed. "I get you," he said. "I'm taking a chance myself. However, I think I can set your

mind at rest. In the first place I came to California recently for my health. The only people I know here are the two young men who are going along to boss the job.

"They are fine fellows, college men, and very desirable in every way. I want you to meet them. You will find everything square and above board." Hemenway had to smile to himself. He was playing very good billiards, he thought.

They talked earnestly for half an hour, then arose and shook hands. As they moved off in opposite directions a man who had been sitting quietly on a bench some distance away got up, stretched himself, and moved off in the wake of the young man who called himself Joseph. Hemenway had not gone many steps before he called to his friend of the bench. The other turned and they came together again. Hemenway said:

"It just occurred to me that you might know of some other young fellow who would like to go along with us. We need one more."

"Offhand, I don't believe I do, but I'll think it over. Good night." They separated.

Hemenway was leisurely walking on about his business when the man who had started to follow the young man hurried up and fell into step with him.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but as I passed I heard what you said to that young fellow. It sounded like a job. Anything doing? I can turn my hand to anything."

Hemenway stopped under an electric light and looked the fellow over. He was apparently about thirty to thirty-five years old, and rather stockily built. He had piercing eyes and there appeared to be a habitual frown on an otherwise not unpleasant face.

"I guess not," said Hemenway, after a thorough inspection of the man. "I don't know you."

"I can give you reference," pleaded the stranger. "Besides"—he hesitated an instant—"that young fellow is a stranger to you, isn't he? I was not far away when you came along and sat beside him on the bench. I'm out of work and looking for it, and if you could help me I would be very much obliged to you."

"I haven't any job that would be of any use to you. There's no money

in it for that young fellow you speak of. Sorry I can't help you out." Hemenway moved away, but the stranger stuck close. He said:

"I'm broke, and if I could only get a place to sleep and something to eat regularly, I wouldn't care so much about the money end of it. It would give me a chance to find something regular."

Hemenway reasoned with himself. "I'm suspicious of this fellow, but I may be wrong. I'll play him carefully. Well," he said aloud, "I'll think it over. I may be able to do something for you. Meet me right here to-morrow night at nine-thirty."

"I'll be here. Thank you. Good night," and the stranger disappeared.

Hemenway went on his way. "Something tells me I overplayed myself with that fellow," he muttered. "Still, I can forget that date, if I want to do so."

The stranger was also busy with his thoughts as he walked off. "I think I made the right play," he soliloquized. "My man is headed for home and is safe enough for to-night. Maybe I can find out what's on his mind by tying up to this other fellow."

He went home, wrote out the following, and mailed it to the W. & J. Axworthy Detective Agency:

No. 1370.

Left office 4:30 and went home. Left house at 7:45, walked to park and sat alone on bench. Well-dressed stranger came along and made his acquaintance. They talked nearly an hour, and stranger made some kind of proposition, for when they parted I passed them and heard stranger ask 1370 if he knew of anybody else that "wanted to go along." When 1370 left I applied to stranger for job, and have appointment with him for to-morrow night when I expect to find out nature of proposition made to 1370. He went home at 9:45.

OPERATIVE No. 28.

## CHAPTER VII.

EXPECTING A JOLT.

**N**EXT day the launch tender, which was up in the basin with the Runaway, towed the yacht down

to Anderson & Brownlow's dock. The schooner had been recently overhauled, and there was little to do on her except see that everything was shipshape.

Hemenway got Anderson to put a scrub crew aboard and, with Jim Carteret, who was off duty until six o'clock that evening, they took the yacht out in the bay to stretch her sails and give Carteret a chance to see how she behaved.

Jim went to the wheel and took command, and in the light breeze that was blowing put the little schooner through her paces. He pointed her close to the wind and beat up the bay in short tacks, then eased sheets for a short reach and finally jibed over for a run before the wind.

The yacht behaved beautifully. After an hour's thorough test Carteret brought her up in the wind and let her hang there.

"You handled her like you had spent all your life on a schooner yacht," declared Anderson. "What do you think of her; a beauty, eh?"

"Don't tell him, Captain Carteret," laughed Hemenway; "he might want to boost the price on me. We haven't signed papers yet."

"No fear of that," said Anderson. "You and I are going to get along without any misunderstandings, Hemenway. Well, what do you say to getting back? I have some work to do."

When the Runaway was made fast Hemenway asked Carteret to go all over the vessel and make any suggestions he thought necessary. While the twin was busy on the yacht, Hemenway went into executive session with Anderson.

The latter promised to lose no time in getting the supplies aboard and rush the other small things so that everything would be ready as soon as possible. When Carteret had finished his inspection of the schooner they left together.

For the last twenty-four hours Hemenway had felt as though he was walking around with a can of nitroglycerin in his pocket. So far everything had gone along smoothly, but he was in that ticklish position of not knowing when somebody would come along and give him a jolt that would scatter him and his project into a thousand pieces.

He felt safe enough with the twins,

but he decided to keep away from Anderson and transact business with him over the telephone.

"Mr. Carteret," said Hemenway as they walked away, "how many of us do you figure it will take to sail that boat? What's the lowest number we can get along with?"

"Those down-east two-masters go to sea with a captain and crew of two men," replied Carteret; "but they were brought up to that sort of thing. We ought to have five, anyway; maybe we could get along with four in a pinch, but I wouldn't want to if I could help it. How are you coming out with your crew; landed anybody yet?"

"Yes, I've got one young fellow who will fit in with us all right. There's another one that I don't know so well, and I don't care much for his style, but he might be a good man to have along to do the menial work, as it were. I am to see them both to-night, and will let you know about them when I get home if you are still awake."

"By the way, Mr. Hemenway, my brother and I have a piano which has just arrived from the East. That will have to go along, and if it is all right to do so I will have it sent down to the schooner from the freight yard."

"Fine business. I will call up Anderson and tell him to put it aboard and see that it is screwed down tight. And you better start getting your things together. Don't forget to take plenty of light clothes."

"I think I will go around in a pair of sneakers and a smile when the weather gets good and hot. While we are about it, let's figure this thing out. Anderson tells me he will have everything ready by next Friday. This is Saturday. Supposing we fix on Sunday morning, a week from to-morrow, for the getaway day. Does that suit you?"

"Fine; the sooner the better."

"Well, then, a week from to-morrow, Sunday, positively. Have everything you are going to take ready by Saturday morning and I will have them sent down to the schooner with my things. And don't forget plenty of cigarettes. There would be no living with you two fellows if you ran out of coffin-nails."

They parted. Hemenway bought two strong, second-hand trunks. Also

he ordered made for him a number of small, light, hard-wood boxes, packed with excelsior and the tops fitted with screws, to be delivered at his office on Wednesday at five-thirty sharp. He then bought the few things he thought he would need on the yacht and went home.

Three hours later he met the young man, Joe, in the park. His good luck still followed him. Joe was quite willing to go along on the yacht. He would be ready on twenty-four hours' notice. But he wouldn't tell his name or his business, or anything of his affairs. Nor would he give Hemenway his home address.

"There's no need of bringing my affairs into this thing," he told Hemenway. "I'll go along all right, as I am quite satisfied to get away and cool off for a while. You'll find me all right when we once get started."

"Very well, then," retorted Hemenway, "report to me here at nine o'clock every night. We are going to leave a week from to-morrow, Sunday morning, early, positively and without fail. You can understand that if I had a crew of old salts and one of them failed to show up it would be a very easy matter to fill his place."

"But this thing is different. I am counting on you, and if you didn't come to time it would place me in a bad hole at the last minute. If you have any doubt about it just tell me now."

Joe fumbled around in his pockets and drew from them eight double-eagles. These he stacked in the palm of his left hand, while with the long, bony fingers of his right he fondled the gold pieces as a poker-player shuffles a pile of chips before he decides to call.

"I'm strictly on the level in this thing," he said, "and to prove it to you I will put this money in your hands as a forfeit, although I don't know who you are, where you come from, or where you are going."

"Now, that sounds like a real sport," cried Hemenway. "Of course, I won't take your money, but you report here every night and we will let it go at that. I guess that's all for now. Good night."

Hemenway had an appointment with the other man at nine-thirty o'clock, and while killing time waiting for that hour he milled over in his mind how



he could handle him to the best advantage.

On general principles it was advisable that he confine his acquaintances to the fewest possible number. So far he had done very well.

He could almost count the number of persons he knew in San Francisco on the fingers of one hand. There was his landlady. She didn't count. There were the twins, Anderson, the young man, Joe, and the men he was about to meet.

The only others in town he had had brief talk with were the Sunday editor, the man he hired his office of, and the janitor of the building. "And that's a plenty," he said to himself.

So when it came time to meet the detective who pretended he wanted a job, Hemenway had made up his mind to tie him up with a promise of work and string him along with a dollar a day until he was ready to pull up stakes.

"Well, my friend, how badly do you want a job?" was his greeting.

"I am ashamed to tell you," replied the gum-shoe man.

"That being the case, I'll give you a chance. I'm going off on an exploring expedition in a few days, and if you want to go along I'll give you twenty-five dollars a month and board. I may be gone some time. Do you want it?"

"Sure I do."

Hemenway cut the conversation to a very few words.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Dennis McDonald."

"Scotch or Irish?"

"Both."

"What's your address?"

The man had one ready and Hemenway made a note of it. He curtly turned aside a question or two and then said:

"How are you fixed?"

"Broke."

"Well, here's a dollar. Meet me here to-morrow night at nine-thirty. I take a walk about this time every night. That's all, I guess." They parted.

"I'm getting to be a very fancy liar," said Hemenway to himself as he strolled toward home. "Lucky I won't need to tell many more. I am running short of ammunition."

McDonald, or whatever his real name was, went home and wrote out

his nightly report. It was no more sensational than the previous document. No. 1370, it seemed, was on his good behavior, and whatever they were trying to catch him at, or fasten on him, or discover, did not develop. McDonald wound up his report with a statement of his deal with Hemenway, and promised developments in a few days.

When the developments did come, however, they were a little too swift for Mr. McDonald.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"HOLD UP YOUR HANDS!"

ON Sunday, Hemenway took a day off, simply keeping his fences in repair by meeting the two men, one after the other, in the park at night.

He said but two words to Joe. McDonald tried to start a conversation, but Hemenway thrust a silver dollar in his hand and told him to be there the following night.

On Monday it was the same.

On Tuesday and Wednesday it was the same.

On Thursday, Anderson reported everything stowed on board; water-tanks full; the yacht ready to sail at a moment's notice.

On Friday, Hemenway telephoned Anderson that he would take the schooner out for a sail early Sunday morning.

"Say," he said; "Marriott is back. Got a wire this morning. He must be in a hurry as he says he will take the first train. Hello! I'm going to send a lot of truck down to-morrow. Put it all in the cabin, will you? Fine. Got the crew all rounded up? Fine. See you later. Good-by."

Hemenway hung up the receiver. "Haven't slipped a cog yet," he said to himself. "Looks as though she was going through without a hitch."

That night Hemenway had a final talk with the two men in the park. He told them where to find the schooner, and instructed them to be there not later than seven o'clock Sunday morning.

When he reached home he told the twins everything was ready, promised to look after their baggage in the morning, warned them to be on hand at seven o'clock sharp, said he probably would not see them again until then

as he had some work of his own to do, and then went to bed for a good, long sleep.

The crucial test was near at hand. The next thirty hours would tell whether he was behind bars or fleeing over the trackless ocean with a fortune in the cabin of the schooner.

In the mean time the gum-shoe man had never earned so easy a week's pay. Joe's life, ever since McDonald had begun to shadow him, had been as calm as that of a chess-player. But with action promised for Sunday at the latest, the sleuth thought he had better talk things over with his chief.

So he went to headquarters on Saturday morning after shadowing his man safely to his place of business. The chief listened attentively, and at the end said:

"All right, we will go through with it that way. Want any help?"

That was where the sleuth overplayed himself.

"Hell, no," he replied. "I'll handle that fellow all right. Leave it to me."

When Joe left his place of business that afternoon and leisurely walked down town he was followed at a reasonable distance by the gum-shoe man.

Joe made several purchases, dumped the bundles in a taxicab, and rode down to where the schooner lay, with McDonald trailing along in another taxi.

Joe had his bundles put on board and quickly drove away. He went to a hotel and ordered a fine dinner. The sleuth seized the opportunity to devour a sandwich and drink a glass of beer. Joe finished his dinner and called for his check.

"I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a goat," he mused as the waiter was making a lightning calculation. He drew a pocket check-book from his clothes, and with a fountain pen filled out a check for two hundred dollars.

"Here, George," he said to the waiter, "get this cashed for me. Tell the cashier to give me gold."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Lent; right away, sir."

Paying his dinner check, Lent made the rounds of the saloons and cigar stores where he was known and cashed checks ranging from five dollars to one hundred dollars each, stuffing the gold he received in

the ten pockets of his trousers and waistcoat. In all he cleaned up close to twelve hundred dollars.

The sleuth was kept busy peering into windows and noting names and addresses while Lent was making his rounds. Finally Lent looked at his watch. "Too early for Isaacs," he thought.

He took in the tail-end of a vaudeville show, played a game or two of billiards at the Palace, and then walked up Market Street for half a mile, turned north for half a block, and went up the steps of a solid-looking building.

He entered the vestibule and closed the door behind him. As he did so a panel of the inner door slid aside and a dim light shone on his features. There was a subdued click and the inner door opened noiselessly. Lent walked up-stairs, entered a room, and was at once greeted by a greasy-looking, short and stout man who wore evening clothes.

"Good evening, Mr. Lent, you are a stranger."

"Busy on other things, Isaacs," replied Lent. "Besides, you keep me broke." He glanced around the room. It was just an ordinary gambling-joint to all outward appearances.

Two faro layouts, a roulette-wheel, and two card-tables were placed where they would do the most good—or harm. There were fewer than ten men in the room, and Lent knew four of them to be employees of Isaacs.

"You don't seem to be very busy to-night. What is this, a prayer-meeting?" observed Lent.

"I don't understand it myself," replied Isaacs; "this ought to be my busy night. Would you like to bet some of your money against mine?"

"You don't think I came around here for five-o'clock tea, do you?"

"Good! Come into the office and I'll deal for you."

Isaacs led the way to a small office back of the big room. In it were a boy's size desk, a safe, and a faro-table. Lent sat down. Isaacs produced a deck of cards, tore off the cover, shuffled with the grace that comes of long experience, placed his hands, palms down, on the table, and smiled at Lent.

"Well, give me some chips," said Lent.

"How many?"

"Hundred dollars will do."

Isaacs scowled slightly. "You're starting in light," he remarked.

Lent flushed, but answered calmly: "Cut out the comment, please."

Isaacs did not make reply, but got the chips and collected five gold pieces. Lent placed a dollar chip on the tray of diamonds and another on the seven of spades, which he coppered. Isaacs snorted.

"I won't wear the skin off my fingers for that kind of betting; what's the matter with you?" he cried.

Lent looked him in the eye. "Isaacs," he said slowly, "you have taken about \$10,000 of my money in the past month. I'm playing my own system. Now you deal."

Isaacs grumbled, but began slipping the cards from the deck. When the cards in the box became exhausted they had gotten action about six times. At the end of an hour Lent was seventy dollars ahead. Isaacs kept badgering Lent to increase his bets.

"When luck is coming your way, as it is to-night, why don't you press it?" he pleaded.

"What are you kicking about. You are getting off cheap," replied Lent, tossing a chip on the king of hearts. "There's my bet. Deal."

The hours went by, Isaacs monotonously dealing, Lent keeping cases and making his unvarying one-dollar bets. Outside, in the big room, there was absolutely nothing doing. Daylight came. Isaacs let his employees go home, one by one. Only he and Lent remained. At last Isaacs hit the table with his fist.

"I got enough of this," he sneered. "You are making a sucker of me. I quit right here." He looked greasier than ever.

"Wait a minute, Isaacs; don't be fussy," said Lent. He looked at his watch. "It is now exactly twenty minutes of seven. One more deal and I'll make you a bet that will stand your hair on end."

Isaacs gathered up the cards, shuffled them, and began a new deal. When it was completed he looked at Lent and said: "Well?"

"Get me a good stiff drink of whiskey, call a taxicab, and then I'll bet you," said Lent.

Isaacs brought the whiskey and stepped to the telephone.

"Tell them not to stop the motor, I'll be right down," Lent called out. A moment later Isaacs hung up the receiver and returned to his office. "What's your proposition?" said the gambler.

"Cash in these chips first," ordered Lent.

Isaacs did so.

"Now," said Lent, "I'll bet you a thousand dollars on the first turn of the cards."

"Where's your money," demanded Isaacs.

Lent went through his pockets and stacked a column of gold on the table.

"Where's yours?" he said. "Cover that money if you want my bet."

Isaacs shrugged his shoulders, went to his safe and matched Lent's pile. "You are putting me to a lot of trouble, Mr. Lent, because I'm going to win your money, anyway."

The noise of the taxicab was heard as it drew up to the curb below.

"Are you?" cried Lent, slipping a revolver out of his pocket. "Throw up your hands! Up with them!" Lent stepped close and felt around the gambler's rear pockets. "Now take off your coat—take it off," he repeated quickly. "Now, you dirty robber, I'm going to give you a taste of your own medicine. Put up your hands!"

Lent transferred his gun from right to left hand, stepped close again, and putting all the power he could muster into the blow, sent his right fist crashing into the gambler's stomach.

Isaacs crumbled to the floor with a gasp. Lent was on top of him in an instant and choked him until he grew blue in the face. Then he whisked a small coil of wire and a pair of pliers from his coat pocket, rolled the gambler over and first bound his ankles and then his wrists behind him. Next he shoved his handkerchief in Isaacs's mouth and tied the gambler's own handkerchief over it.

Still working rapidly, he rifled the open safe of everything that looked like money, dumped gold and banknotes in the Tuxedo coat, rolled the whole thing up, cast a final glance at Isaacs, let himself out of the building, jumped in the front seat of the taxi and cried: "Let her go!"

"Hey!" yelled Dennis McDonald, dashing out from the doorway opposite. But the taxi did not stop.

(To be continued)

This story began April 25 in THE CAVALIER. Our reason for carrying it in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is that you may have the opening chapters, and thus be able to go on with it when the ALL-STORY and THE CAVALIER are combined with the May 16 issue.

# CAPTAIN VELVET'S REVOLT\*

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Captain Velvet's Welcome," "A Forty-Story Fugitive,"  
"Born To Trouble," "A Bunch of Bad Luck," Etc.

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FOLLOWING a minor revolution in the republic of Santa Chansa, South America, which places Senor Pacato in the presidency through the efforts of Captain Velvet, three slick crooks seek protection on an American battle-ship in the harbor. These are "Smiling" (otherwise Robert) Pollard, the Spanish Brute (William Ryan), and the Snake (James Evans). They are recognized by members of the crew, who charge the Snake and Brute with various swindles. Meanwhile in the *galacie* in Relampago Captain Velvet is made president *pro tem* by Pacato, who flees. The members of the cabinet resign after attempts to assassinate them. On the war-ship Pollard threatens the captain with exposure of a lurid Brooklyn episode, and with his help they get ashore. They are surprised at being welcomed warmly by Bentino, chief of the secret police.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ELEVATION.

EVEN in our gladderest moments, when every indication shows that peace and happiness have at last settled down to stay, chill suspicion will sometimes come that all is not well.

For an instant some such unpleasant sensation flickered through Mr. Pollard. He seemed to remember Captain Velvet as they had last seen him, a foot-long revolver in either hand, inviting them to die on the spot or in the Plaza Libertad, as they chose.

He stiffened queerly, and his lips compressed; he was aware that the Snake on one side, and William Ryan on the other, were dragging back like frightened children.

And then the instant was over and the tread had passed the doorway.

Captain Velvet himself strode down upon them, hands outstretched in welcome so hearty that they turned weak with pure relief.

His sharp eyes twinkled the kindest light; the wealth of pure, benevolent affection in his smile went straight to Robert Pollard's heart and

warmed it through and through; and with emotion so real that his voice trembled, he cried:

"Boys, I'm *glad* to see you! Robby, shake hands!"

"Well—captain—" was all their chief could stammer.

"And Jimmy here, and Bill, too!" the acting president added, joyfully, as he wrung their limp hands. "Come right in here, boys! Come right this way!"

He threw a mighty arm about Robert Pollard and drew him into the Red Room; he reached back resistlessly for the Snake and for William Ryan, who stumbled dazedly after; and apparently unaware of the inane, almost imbecile smile, which was the best Mr. Pollard could produce for the moment, the good captain slammed the door and, for some five seconds, looked them over.

It was an extremely keen survey, too, yet the fact did not impress Mr. Pollard just then; a certain little speech which he had prepared rather carefully these last ten minutes, was

\*This story is a sequel to "Captain Velvet's Welcome," which was published in The Cavalier from January 3 to January 24, 1914.

trying to reach his lips in the best possible shape.

He looked the captain in the eye, therefore, and turned grave and apologetic as he began:

"Captain, I don't know what you can have thought of us. I feel—well, I think we all feel—that you know us well enough to know that we'd have done our duty if we'd had the chance. But when we got to the street from that restaurant there was a gang waiting for us. They surrounded us and—"

Captain Velvet stayed the wild flight of poor mendacity.

"Robby," he said, "don't bother explaining all that. I—why, I know all about it."

"You—"

"And it's of no importance now, anyway, son," said the president *pro tem*. "Later on, when we have a lot more time, we'll talk it all over. Just now, are you boys ready for business?"

"What sort of business?" Ryan asked.

The captain looked at him in mild, innocent amazement.

"Well, Bill, I promised you three pretty good jobs in this republic; didn't I?"

The Brute nodded.

"When I make a promise, I keep it, no matter what!" the simple soul said virtuously. "I've saved you boys the three best jobs in the whole darned country!"

He glanced affectionately at Mr. Pollard's fascinated smile.

"You been around town long?" he asked rather keenly.

"Only an hour or two."

"Know Spanish?"

"No."

"Either of you?" asked the captain quickly.

"I know about ten words," Mr. Ryan confessed. "That's all."

"Then you haven't had a chance to look through the papers or hear people—well, it doesn't matter," beamed the good captain, catching himself, with a strange, flitting smile.

"The Spanish part won't make any difference. I'll see that you have all the clerks and interpreters you need. What we want down here is the brains, and you boys have that—and don't look so humble, Robby," he added, with extreme kindness.

"Don't think I'm holding anything against you, because I'm not. Those little tricks you tried on me in New York just amused me, because I could see all the time that it was just natural playfulness and nothing else. I know when to forgive a feller—and when not," concluded the captain, rather enigmatically, as he laid an arm across the Snake's slim shoulders and ignored the peculiar shrinking that overtook them almost instantly.

"Young fellers, this country's calling for you! Are you ready?"

Mr. Pollard cleared his throat.

"Captain," he said, with gentle dignity, "we are ready to serve the country to the best of our humble capacity, or to do anything else that will show our high appreciation of your kindness."

"Spoken like a man!" Captain Velvet said heartily. "Robby, I'm president of this republic for a few days. I appoint you Minister of State!"

"Appoint me—what?"

"Minister of State—same as Secretary of State back home. The salary's fifty thousand dollars a year, United States, and it begins now."

There was a table behind Mr. Pollard. He leaned against it rather weakly and smiled as he sought for a properly gay answer to the captain's pleasantry; but the latter had turned even now to Mr. Ryan.

"Bill," he said earnestly, "I've saved something for you that I think you'll like. A lot of the biggest generals in the country have been after me for this, for days, but I've told 'em, one and all, the same thing: 'If I can't get my friend Bill, I'll think about appointing you; but I've got to be darned sure first that I can't get Bill!'"

He laid a kindly hand on the staring Brute's shoulder.

"Son, I appoint you Minister of War of this here republic!"

"Me?" gurgled Mr. Ryan.

"You, Bill!" beamed Captain Velvet. "The regular army's all sworn allegiance to Mike Pacato. You've got ten thousand of the finest, happiest, fiercest, fighting men in the world under you. The salary's the same—fifty thousand—and I hope you'll like the work."

"Well—cap!" stammered Mr. Ryan.

Captain Velvet rubbed his hands

briskly and turned his effulgent smile upon the Snake.

"You see, I did my level best to save jobs that would just suit you fellows, whether it made hard feelings among the regular office-seekers or not. Robby's pretty slick, and a good thinker; he'll make a great Minister of State. Bill's a big, strong chap that the whole army'll cheer every time they see him.

"But as for you, Jimmy, you're the sharp, bright little cuss of the lot. Like to handle bunches of real money?"

"Yes!" whispered the Snake, dizzily, as from a beautiful dream. "Yes! Go on!"

"James," said Captain Velvet, "hereby and without further notice of any kind, I make you Minister of Finance, with full charge of the country's wealth, and the same salary. There's the keys of the national treasury, and you'll find the treasury itself right next door in the little granite building!"

"These?" breathed the Snake, as he jingled the ring so lately discarded by Señor Norita.

"Those are the keys," chuckled the captain. "The big one's for the main door and the little ones belong to the vaults. She's locked up just now."

He turned and included them all in a magnificent gesture of his out-thrown arms.

"There, by ginger! Did I keep my word?"

To some extent the strange occlusion in Pollard's throat was departing. His brain, which had spun crazily for a moment, was settling down again.

He examined the captain breathlessly. No maniac glare shone in that kindly eye; and whatever sort of queer little country this might be, and however popular the captain, they would never allow him here, in the very bosom of their government, unless he was actually mentally sound!

The astounding truth broke upon Robert Pollard suddenly: it was actual fact!

"Captain," he said throatily, "I—don't know how to thank you!"

"Well, Robby, no thanks at all are necessary," the captain assured him, with great truth and an odd sigh of relief. "You've no idea how important a good cabinet is just now, and how glad I am to have found the right

men for it. Pretty soon we'll add a few more minor ministers, but you three'll be the bosses. And it's pretty sudden, I know, but—will you get right to work?"

"Well, if you'll give us a couple o' tips—" the Brute suggested.

"You don't need 'em," said Captain Velvet. "All you have to do is just be on your job, Bill. Come over here!"

He opened the door and looked questioningly at Bentino. He indicated that gentleman and said:

"This here's Bentino, chief of our secret police, boys. He'll show you your offices—and I guess the best thing you can do, Robby, is to call a Cabinet meeting right off and talk over how you're going to govern Santa Chanza.

"I'll see that it's announced in all the papers; and I don't know three fellows I'd rather see talked about as a Cabinet just now!" concluded the benevolent president *pro tem*, and closed the door.

Some few seconds they stood there, stunned. At the main entrance half a dozen dark-brown faces peered in curiously, examined them and, at a sign from Bentino, popped out of sight again; and across the tiled corridor the chief of secret police was opening doors as he said briskly:

"The office of the Minister of State—it is here, excellency. And here the Department of War—for you, *señor*?"

"That's mine, bo!" Mr. Ryan managed to say. "That's all mine."

"And of the Minister of Finance, this is the headquarters," the chief pursued, "while here we find the commodious official meeting-room of the honored Cabinet, as a body. The excellencies will consent to enter?"

He waved toward the last-named apartment and stood aside, smiling brilliant satisfaction as they looked about.

As a Cabinet room, doubtless, it was all that could have been desired. A long table stood in the center, with chairs down either side; there were windows along one wall and a long chandelier in the middle.

Yet it struck the rapidly calming Minister of State that something more than numb stares might be expected of him, and he turned abruptly to Bentino with:

"That's all for the present. We're going to—er—hold a meeting now."



The head of the secret police bowed low and disappeared behind the closing door; Mr. Pollard stepped after him and, with deft hand, turned the key without a sound—and then Mr. Pollard himself turned and walked smartly to his place at the head of the table, while the Minister of War slumped into a place on one side and the Minister of Finance grinned nervously from a chair at the other.

"Robby," the Minister of War asked hoarsely, by way of opening the official proceedings, "is it safe to stick here?"

Mr. Pollard's eyes opened.

"Why not?"

"The old guy's crazy," submitted the Minister of War, with deep conviction. "Any second he may get disgusted with this Cabinet and decide to shoot it up and—"

"He's no more crazy than you are, Bill," smiled the Minister of State. "He is just what I sized him up for the first time we saw him—a simple, honest old fool! There's nothing crazy about him. There's nothing crazy about this. We've walked into town at the right second and sat down in the richest butter-tub that ever happened!"

His old-time smile flashed upon them, and the Minister of State leaned his elbows on the shining table.

"So the best thing we can do now is to open this meeting officially and decide what the Cabinet's going to do to Santa Chanza!" he pursued happily. "Who has something to suggest?"

"You mean for a clean-up?" the Minister of War inquired.

"That's what we're here for."

"Would it be bad to stick to the jobs and pull in the salary for a while?" asked the Snake earnestly. "Fifty thousand a year's a thousand a week, or almost. We never made that as a steady thing."

"And we'll never make it as a steady thing in a country where one man can go up and punch the president and put another fellow in his place—and have the populace fall for it," the Minister of State said sagely.

The new Minister of War cleared his throat.

"Well, Robby, according to the captain, we're bosses of this country?"

"Yes."

"Fine! Let's sell the country to

some hick back home!" urged the head of the army. "We can make it legal; sign all the papers and—"

"Bill!" snapped the Minister of State, "this Cabinet meeting is for official business, and not blasted nonsense."

"All right, then, here's another," said the War Department brilliantly.

"The army belongs to me. See? Ten thousand men!"

"Well?"

"This way." The Minister of War grinned broadly. "I issue an order; I tell 'em that next month pay will be raised fifteen dollars a month for every man that's been in the service one month. Get it?"

"Go on."

"As quick as they get that through 'em we'll get some slick natives and send 'em out with word that every man who wants to hold his job as a soldier under me has to come up with a ten-dollar bill. See? Every guy that's in the army now'll fall for it, and we'll have new ones coming in, a hundred an hour!"

The Minister of War leaned back and sought to look modest.

"It might be good for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

The Minister of State considered very briefly.

"And then, again, it might not," he decided. "We may pull that later, Bill, just before we make our getaway, but it's too risky now. It might start some one to suspecting that this new Cabinet wasn't right, and we can't afford that."

He stopped and looked sharply at the Minister of Finance.

"What's the matter with you?"

Slender hands clutching the edge of the table, the Snake looked from one to the other with eyes as dreamy as those that had met his appointment.

"I was only wondering why we were sitting here trying to dope out how to get the money!" he stated.

"Eh?"

The Minister of Finance leaned across the table. His dreamy eyes gleamed suddenly and his voice dropped to a whisper.

"Well, haven't we got it now?" he demanded. "Haven't I got the keys of the national treasury in my pocket?"

"I'd forgotten that!" the Minister of State muttered.

"Is there anything in your treasury, Snake?" the Minister of War inquired skeptically.

The Minister of Finance glided lithely out of his chair.

"Is there any easier way of finding out than looking?" he asked. "Come on!"

The Cabinet of Santa Chanza, for the time, seemed to have adjourned.

The Minister of War, rising quickly, hurried after his associate; yet Mr. Pollard was at the door before either, and he laid a hand on the knob and turned to snap:

"Wait a minute! This isn't a foot-race; it's the new administration going to take the first official look at the nation's wealth, and it's a stately, solemn proceeding that we have to dress up with a little dignity."

He expanded his own chest and smiled serenely.

"You know, it's ten chances to one the old captain will have a little mob out there waiting to cheer us."

He turned the key and stepped out, with slow, majestic tread, and looked about.

And while space itself might have been just a trifle more quiet, it could have been no more deserted than the corridor of the strangely still palace.

"Some one pinched the mob, Robby!" the Minister of War observed.

"So much the better!" Mr. Pollard said irritably. "We'll be able to get in there without even being seen. I saw the place as we came in; there must be a door leading to it over this way."

He turned on his heel and led the way, very quietly indeed, this time, to the far end of the corridor and cast about quickly.

There was a smaller corridor, at an angle, and a smaller door beyond; he hurried to it and opened it, this time to reveal a covered passage and, at its end, a solid oaken door in a solid granite wall.

The Minister of State turned, color rising.

"This is it, Snake!" he whispered. "Where's the key?"

Rather grudgingly, Mr. Evans surrendered it to the chief of the band and watched him thrust it soundlessly into the lock. A wrench and a crunch and the door swung open, creaking; they stepped in and closed it behind them, creaking again.

The Snake peered about suspiciously.

"They must use this treasury a lot!" he observed. "Look at the little office in there! Look at the dust on—"

The Minister of State was not listening.

The switch on the wall had been obliging enough to light the whole building at his first twist, and Mr. Pollard was hurrying down the stone corridor to the big steel door at the rear.

It was an elderly thing, well coated with rust, and dating from the glad days before combination locks came to confuse the earnest criminal worker; yet the sight of it was strangely exhilarating to Santa Chanza's new Cabinet.

A distinctly professional calm settled upon them, too. The Snake, stepping soundlessly back to the door, listened for a moment and threw the inner bolt into place.

The Minister of War hurried into the queer little musty office and, after a keen and cautious glance at the sunlit world beyond, drew down the shade to the bottom of the sash.

Meanwhile, the Minister of State worked deftly with his keys. They came to his sides and waited tensely—and with quite an astonishing thud the fifth key threw the tumbler of the vault lock and the sound echoed through the place.

Just an instant they looked at one another and smiled excitedly; then three hands landed upon the handle and tugged. A new, long creak, in a deeper tone this time, and the wealth of the nation lay before them.

It was not immediately visible. It lay, presumably, behind the doors of the compartments that ran down either side of the big steel room beyond.

The Minister of Finance hurried to the nearest and fumbled at the knob as he said:

"Let's have those keys, Robby. This—"

His voice died out. The door had come open in his hand, and beyond it lay a black pit of steel; and the Minister of Finance stood back breathing hard, and found a match and lighted it for a better view of the gold that lay within—and having lighted it, he turned suddenly and cried:

"This thing's empty!"

"Yes, and this one's empty!" the

Minister of War reported from the other side, and seized a new door and tugged. "And if it comes down to that, this one's got two inches of dust in it and nothing more!"

His heavy jaw dropped as he wheeled on the Snake, just tugging open the fourth creaking panel. The Minister of Finance's voice came as a broken whine:

"Say! There hasn't been any coin in this place since they built it!"

At the far end of the vault the Minister of State glanced up grimly.

"Those things look as if they'd been built for storing papers, anyway," he said. "This big one's locked."

He returned to the task of fitting its key, and they lounged rather gloomily to his side.

A treasury, obviously, is built solely for the purpose of tucking away the nation's treasure, in the shape of cash; and however vague their expectations, a treasury at least nine-tenths empty certainly fell below them.

Enthusiasm, in fact, had ebbed wonderfully in the Minister of War and the Minister of Finance these last few seconds.

They looked at the rows of open doors and snarled aloud; they looked back to Mr. Pollard—and all in a twinkling enthusiasm rose again with a swirl, for the Minister of State was on his knees before the last compartment as the door opened, staring inward and uttering a strange series of little gasps.

A moment he hunched there, petrified! Then both hands reached in and the Minister of State drew forth a mighty package of yellow banknotes, new and crisp, flaunting the ornate design of Santa Chanza's paper money.

About them a paper band had been fastened neatly; he ripped it away and watched loose money surge to his lap.

And he laughed wildly and moved back a little to count it, for the balance of the Cabinet were crushing their way into the compartment, shoulder to shoulder, pawing, chattering, sputtering into sight again with arms filled with similar packages.

Trembling, they clutched them and stared at the Minister of State; and that dignitary recovered his composure at the sight of them. The band lay at his side; he picked it up and examined its printing.

He leaned forward, too, and peered sharply at the bands that held together their own yellow packages—and sheer feeling turned Mr. Pollard's cheek to a ghastly green!

"How many—have you there, Snake?" he asked hoarsely.

The smaller member returned, partially, to consciousness.

"Lemme see, Robby!" he croaked. "There's seventeen."

"And Bill's got twelve—and there's one loose there on the floor," counted the Minister of State. "That's thirty packages, and they're all the same."

"And this one's marked five hundred thou—"

"They're all marked 'five hundred thousand dollars,' and every one of their dollars down here is good for eighty cents in New York!" cried Mr. Pollard.

And there his voice cracked completely, and the hand he laid upon the arm of the Minister of Finance was decidedly shaky.

"Snake! Bill!" he squeaked. "We've made the big haul at last! *We've got fifteen million dollars here!*"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEGLECTED MITE.

YOUR truly great leader of men cannot possibly be jarred for more than a few seconds at a time.

Let the—real or figurative—cannon ball pass straight through him, and if he be of the truly great he will, after the first slight shock, issue a terse command for the dressing of the wound and immediately proceed to the important business of the day with renewed vigor.

Within the half minute Robert Pollard justified his position as head of the sinful trio.

A sweep of his handkerchief mopped the sudden perspiration from his forehead, and seemed at the same time, in some mystic fashion, to endow his features with an entirely new expression.

Unnatural, cold calm had succeeded the wildness of his eye; pinkish color had returned to his cheeks and his jaws were set grimly.

But no such splendid quiet blessed William Ryan; thrice he swallowed before he was capable of the gasping:

"Well, get it together! Who's got a newspaper to do it up in? Where's a hunk of string—"

"P-s-st!" said the chief.

"Robby, somebody might bust a way in here any second!" fumed the Brute. "That office window faces the back of the square. Get out there and I'll pass it and—"

The angry weariness in Robert Pollard's expression stopped him.

"When you're through with that fit," said the Minister of State, "get down and gather up those bills and pin this band around them. Give me those you're holding now. Snake, pile back yours just as you found them."

The Minister of Finance reeled.

"Pile 'em back!"

"Yes!"

"Say! Are we going to make all this money a present to this bloody little two-cent country?" Mr. Ryan demanded fiercely.

Robert Pollard replaced six million dollars' worth of gold notes with nice care before replying.

"We're not!" he said briefly.

"Neither are we going to walk out in the middle of a sunny afternoon, with not less than twenty thousand people around, and try to get away with all the money they own!"

He watched the Snake rather dazedly returning bundles of notes to their place.

"And hurry up with that loose stuff, Bill," he snapped. "If we can get back without Velvet finding out that we've been here, so much the better. We—damn it! Give me that stuff! There!"

He snatched just half a million dollars' worth of paper and tucked it carefully into place again; then, with hand once more quite steady, he closed the door gently and turned the key.

"Now straight back for the Cabinet room, and if the old scoundrel sees us, say that we were just looking around," ordered the Minister of State.

"And while we're gone, somebody comes and gets this—" the Brute said brokenly.

"I don't believe there's a duplicate set of these keys. If there is, he's got 'em. And if he wanted that stuff he'd have taken it away before this—or else he doesn't know it's there at all!" said Mr. Pollard with excellent reasoning. "March!"

He set the example by resuming a really stately tread and leading the way out of Santa Chanza's queer little treasury building.

Softly he closed the creaking door behind them and turned the key once more. Head erect, majestic eye alert, he passed down the little corridor and into the greater one.

It was quite as deserted as before—and Mr. Pollard chuckled richly.

In other lands, governmental headquarters might be thronged with hurrying, watchful employees, surcharged with keen-eyed politicians and curious emissaries from the outlying districts; but Santa Chanza's little palacio was no less than ideal in its silent emptiness.

The Cabinet room was peaceful as before, too. He locked the door behind them and took his place, frowning thoughtfully, tapping out an impatient little tune with his finger-nails as the Minister of War slouched to one chair sulkily and the Minister of Finance perched nervously on the edge of another.

"Cabinet's in session again," he said briefly. "There's not much to debate, either. I doped the whole thing out coming up that passage."

William Ryan sniffed and opened his lips.

"And here's where we stand and here's what we do," the Minister of State went on briskly. "Velvet trusts us implicitly—that's pretty plain. We can come and go as we please without a soul in the whole republic daring to ask a question. Next, we came here to trim Captain Velvet and—"

"And now we're going to forget him and take what we found!" the Snake put in with sudden relief. "That's a good idea, Robby. Trying to trim that—"

"If the Department of Finance will be good enough to dry up," snapped the Minister of State, "I'll tell you what we're going to do. We came here to trim Velvet. We're going to do just that!"

"When—"

"We know what's in that treasury, and we can get to it inside of five minutes, day or night," Pollard said tensely. "That stuff is as good as in New York at this minute. We know the captain has another million or two tucked away somewhere, and it would be a sin to go away without it."

"You know, once upon a time there was a hog—" the Minister of War began thickly.

"I'm no hog, Bill; I'm just a conscientious little worker that hates to leave any rough spots on a job," the Minister of State smiled cheerfully.

"Nix! *We're going to get it all!* We're going to make the greatest clean-up in the whole history of refined crime! When we've put the last high polish on this job we'll have done something that crooks will talk about five hundred years from now—and never beat.

"In another twenty-four hours we'll be out of this country with fifteen million dollars straight!"

His glowing eyes settled on the Snake and stirred up a faint reflection of their fire. The Brute, to be sure, merely growled and did not move; but the Minister of Finance leaned forward and breathed:

"Robby, that's five million dollars apiece! What can't a man do with five million dollars?"

The Minister of State permitted himself a rather boisterous laugh.

"Jimmy," he said, "he can buy a country house and a city house; he can quit crooked work forever and buy any cop that dares remember him, just with the loose change in his pocket. He can get a fleet of steam yachts and an automobile factory and marry a millionairess. He can buy a camp in Maine and—"

And there he stopped, nailed by the strange stare of William Ryan.

"That's three times the door of that closet's moved!" stated the Minister of War as he rose.

Mr. Pollard's teeth shut with a click as he whizzed out of his own chair and glared toward the corner and the tall clothes-closet it revealed.

"Spies?" he whispered.

"You could have doped that out ahead of time," the Snake whispered bitterly. "Would Velvet—"

A furious and wicked light gleamed in Robert Pollard's eye.

"I don't know whether he would or not," he muttered; "but no man's going to stand between me and that wad of money now, Snake! Get over by the door and take a chair with you to rap him with!"

He turned and beckoned the Minister of War to his side.

"There can't be more than one in

there," he pursued. "You can handle him if he makes for the window?"

"I've licked five when—"

"Get over there, then! Give me that brass ruler first; there must be five pounds of metal in that," ordered the Minister of State, and his teeth bared in a most unpleasant fashion.

"The main thing is not to let him yell for help. He isn't going to get out of here, whether he yells or not."

Some two or three seconds he waited as they took their stations.

He slid out of his coat then and tucked up the right sleeve comfortably, his steady gaze upon the disturbing closet door; and when the wiry forearm was quite ready for business he wound his fingers about the weapon and tiptoed softly across the room.

It was in, every way an unfortunate mischance—unfortunate chiefly for the man in the closet.

In the natural order of things a husky citizen would have been assigned to that particular job, Mr. Pollard reflected, and grew very calm indeed; in arguing a really husky citizen into complete silence, the great consideration is to plant the first blow in just the right spot.

The Minister of State, in his own modest way, was something of an anatomical expert.

He gathered his muscles and laid soundless fingers on the closet door; he tore it open and bounded back, in the thousandth part of a second, and his ruler whistled back for the smashing blow.

And then dropped rather limply, for from the closet stepped perhaps the smallest of Santa Chanza's small citizens—not fearfully or ferociously, but quite as a matter of course and with a somewhat pale, nervous smile.

He rubbed his thin hands and bowed politely to the Minister of State as he observed in fair English:

"Señor, I salute you—the master!"

Mr. Pollard merely stared on. The person might have been forty or a little more; he was thin to a degree, and wore a queer, downtrodden air.

Yet there was something about him that reassured Mr. Pollard queerly after the first shock—the crafty, evil light in his eye.

Be he what he might, the little stranger was at least not that most wretchedly inconvenient of all things, an honest man.

"The Minister of State, I presume, from the voice?" he asked gently.

"What the—" began Mr. Pollard, breath returning.

The forlorn little man's eyes opened.

"You do not know me?"

"We don't know you, ho, and we don't want to know you!" The Minister of War bounded to his side and looked down on him. "You've let yourself in for this by sneaking in here, and now—"

"*Señor,*" the diminutive citizen broke in, "I do not sneak. As you approached, I stepped in there, for one does not know these days who will shoot and who will smile. For the rest, *señors*, I remained there, because the business of this meeting interested me greatly. *Señors*, I am Zarapa, first assistant Minister of State!"

"I didn't know there was one!" Mr. Pollard muttered.

Surely, as a mere observation, it was conventional and ordinary enough; by the balance of the Cabinet it even passed unnoticed. But upon the mysterious Zarapa its effect was galvanic.

Color rushed to his cheeks and his small eyes flashed malevolently; one thin, vibrating finger pointed in the most astounding fashion at Robert Pollard and—

"Yes, that is it! You did not know!" the little man shrilled passionately. "So through six administrations I have served as first assistant Minister of State, doing the work of the Minister of State himself—and not one of them appeared to know that I inhabited the same earth! Why? I demand of you, *why?*"

"I give it up!" said Robert Pollard.

"Then it is for me to tell you!" his aid cried with growing vehemence. "They did not know because, one and all, they were occupied in getting—what do you call it?—ah! In getting the graft! That is it, *señor!*"

"Day and night, night and day, while I worked, they stole! And I? I am small—humble—insignificant, as one says! They look at me and smile and steal! They laugh at me and kick me and steal some more! That is all."

His voice broke suddenly, and he concluded in a strange, pathetic little whine:

"*Señors*, before you stands revealed the one man in all Santa Chanza who has never touched this graft!"

"Because they never let you get to it?" the Minister of Finance asked, with deep interest.

"For that reason!" the little man replied bitterly. "I, who with but one-half of the chance as you say, could steal the whole republic and ship it out of South America before they knew!"

A heavy, disappointed sigh escaped him, but he brightened quickly and turned to Mr. Pollard.

"But I have listened to you, *señor,*" he said, with deep respect. "I understand that the day of petty thievery is gone from our beloved republic, and that the masters are with us at last. And the great Americans are just men!" he ended wistfully. "You will permit me to aid and to share, if only a little?"

All in all, of course, the first assistant was a trifle too astonishing for instant assimilation.

Mr. Pollard glanced at the Minister of War and grinned faint perplexity, and the minister nodded.

"It's a shame a bright little guy like him never had a chance—huh?" he suggested.

"He looks on the level, and he could throw this Spanish language around when we need it," the Minister of Finance submitted sanely. "Anyway, if you turn him down he can go to Velvet and—"

Zarapa fairly whirled upon him.

"No, *señor!*" he cried. "Yourself, perhaps, I might shoot—from a distance—but not that! Him I hate!"

"Yes, and if he isn't on the level—" the Minister of State began calmly.

Again his first assistant broke in.

"*Señor!*" he protested. "Do I not convince? Listen! You would remove the treasures of this Velvet who has cursed our beloved land so long. Do you know where to find them?"

"No," escaped the Snake.

"I will tell you!" The mite rubbed his hands excitedly. "And having secured them, can you leave so swiftly, so certainly, by such unfrequented streets that none will know—for hours?"

"We—"

"This, too, I will arrange!" Zarapa said feverishly, and drew Mr. Pollard nearer. "Again listen! In the cellar of Velvet's house, stored in a vault of which I have knowledge, are



jewels and gold to the amount of three millions of our money. You can contrive to dine with him to-night?"

"Probably."

"Do so. I shall give you plans of the house. I shall reach his cook and make sure that his food alone is drugged, and heavily. I shall arrange that his two other servants, brothers, are called to the bedside of their dying mother, twenty miles distant."

"When they are gone, *señor*, and he sleeps soundly, go to the cellar and open his vault. "I shall be waiting by the east wall with a swift automobile."

The first assistant Minister of State broke off and tapped his chest.

"Poof! It is done!" he concluded. "The braggart coward who has afflicted our land has become the impoverished joke! And we are rich!"

"And a little shrimp like you isn't afraid to tackle him?" inquired the Brute with some admiration.

Zarapa shuddered slightly.

"Here in Santa Chanza all fear Velvet," he submitted. "Beside, I do not tackle him, as you say. I am without, waiting in the swift automobile. And it is all quite safe, for one does not suspect me!" he ended bitterly, and peered anxiously from one to the other. "You consent?"

"If it can be run off as easily as that—" Pollard began, smiling blandly.

"It is already running, *señor*!" his assistant informed him, and darted to the door. "I fly!"

For a matter of many seconds the chief of the trio looked at the door after it closed noiselessly behind him.

"I believe that little cuss is perfectly square," he said.

"He's the best little crook that ever lived," the Minister of War said enthusiastically. "He can think like a streak of lightning, too. Give him a little training and we can keep him with us permanent. What about it, Snake?"

The Minister of Finance glanced up, from the cards he had taken to spreading on the table.

"I'll tell you what about him, in two minutes," he said gravely. "I'm looking him up."

The Minister of State laughed impatiently.

"Put those fool things away, Jim!" he commanded. "We'll have to fix up the details of this, and then—"

"He's 'all right!' the Snake an-

nounced imperturbably as his finger indicated a jack. "Here he is, with the honest card next to him. And look here, Robby! Here's the same old combination worked out again: 'turn back to great wealth!' Can you beat that? Can you—"

His voice died out, and so suddenly that both of them turned to him in mild astonishment.

The Snake, indeed, was acting rather oddly; bent over the table, his finger-nail picked frantically at the edge of one of his cards—and picked and picked the harder, until the card separated into two.

An instant he looked at the under pasteboard, and he was on his feet, eyes dilated and choking:

"Robby! Bill! Look! D'ye see what's happened? Two of those cards were stuck tight together, and I never noticed it till this minute!"

"Well, by—" his exasperated chief cried as he strode toward the table.

"They were stuck tight together, and the under card's the right one!" the Snake cried wildly. "Look! Look what it reads now! It isn't 'turn back to great wealth!' It's 'certain death, if you seek great wealth,' Robby! And it's as plain as day, too! That means either 'certain death' or 'great disaster'—that card!"

And he started back, for Mr. Pollard was reaching across the shining table with two savage hands.

One sweep they made and they had gathered the entire pack together.

A violent jerk and the Minister of State had performed the rather strenuous feat of tearing straight through the whole collection; and he hurled the fragments at the Minister of Finance with a vicious:

"That's the last time those cards'll tell your fortune and shake your little one-cent nerve, isn't it, you blasted imbecile?"

The Snake was not even aware of his rage.

"Robby," he said hoarsely, "they never lied yet, did they? When they looked like money, there wasn't anybody readier to turn back than me, was there? And now when they say there's nothing but disaster—"

He caught Mr. Pollard's eye suddenly and shuddered. "Would you go on after that?" he asked faintly.

The Minister of State relaxed with a sour laugh.

"Upon my word, Jimmy," he said, "if I didn't know you as well as I do, I'd have had you locked up somewhere before this. That's the last fortune-telling in this combination. Get it? Now, we'll go for Velvet!"

The Minister of War caught himself and faced his chief with a blustering cough, for the Minister of War had watched the workings of those same cards himself on other occasions.

His chief, however, had dismissed the matter completely and was smiling again as he said:

"It's getting dark now; it'll be night in another half-hour. I don't know what time he dines, and I suppose we'll have to give that little runt an hour or two to fix things, but we'll go in and invite ourselves, anyway."

He looked them over sharply.

"You might work up a sort of genial grin for the occasion, too," he suggested. "Keep that little vault in mind, with nearly three million dollars in it for us!"

The insidious germ of very big business, in whatever line, has brought a smile too bright to many a man.

Robert Pollard fairly radiated as he left the Cabinet room and stepped blithely toward the office of Santa Chanza's president. His spirits were high, too, and it was only with an effort that he managed to knock softly on the door.

It opened with queer speed, and Bentino, glaring at them for an instant, beamed pleasantly at them and stepped aside—and then, after a swift interchange of glances with Captain Velvet, who sat at his desk, stepped outside.

The president *pro tem.* leaned back comfortably and smiled his honest, whole-souled affection at them as he inquired:

"Cabinet getting on nicely?"

Its Minister of State permitted a gentle laugh to tremble through the big apartment as he sauntered over to the desk.

"The Cabinet's working up an appetite," he reported cheerfully. "We've adjourned long enough to have you ask us out to dinner this evening."

Captain Velvet's smile vanished slowly and a thoughtful cast came over his countenance.

"You mean out to my house?"

"Yes, indeed."

The good captain stroked his beard. Unconsciously, perhaps, he reached into their pretty tree of expectations and plucked away one of the brightest fruits.

"Well, we won't eat out there to-night," he said flatly. "There's too much—for us to do right here."

He turned and shuffled over several papers that lay before him; he bunched them and tucked them carefully into his flat, worn old wallet—and Robert Pollard smiled quite as serenely.

There were other nights, of course, and a vault that has stayed in place, presumably, for quarter of a century, may be depended upon to remain passive a little longer.

And as he smiled the good captain reached out with both hands into their pretty tree and tore away an entire side; for he patted the wallet and looked at Robert Pollard and said:

"They've got some darned particular, methodical people in the United States navy, hey?"

"They have to be," the Minister of State murmured pleasantly.

"Well, they are! All these papers are itemized receipts from the commander of the battle-ship that sailed out of here last night for New York!"

The captain laid the wallet carefully in his pocket and became confidential.

"You see, Robby," he said, "I've kept an awful quantity of valuable stuff in my home for years and years—millions of dollars' worth, more'n any man has any business keeping around the house."

"Yes?" said the Minister of State, with lips suddenly grown dry.

"It just struck me what a safe place New York is for money and what a fool thing it was to keep all that in the house!" chuckled the good captain.

"So I just fixed it with the commander of that battle-ship when he was ashore day before yesterday, and he's going to put it all in a real vault for me, up in your home town—four little boxes, two steel trunks, four oak chests—and them's the receipts!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BITTER TRUTH.

PRIMITIVE man was rather strong in William Ryan. Sting him sufficiently and he

worked back inevitably to physical violence as the only possible answer; and just now, looking at Captain Velvet, his color rose angrily and his fists clenched.

In a matter of three or four seconds the Brute would be seeking to thrash the captain for sending his own goods to safety, Mr. Pollard observed—and the sight served to subdue certain lively emotions that were rising in his own bosom.

He stepped forward quickly and tucked an innocent-looking hand under Mr. Ryan's arm with a warning twitch at his sleeve; and as the Brute relaxed somewhat, breathing heavily, he turned his smile back upon the captain and said:

"So it's—all gone, eh?"

"Every sou," muttered the president *pro tem*. "There ain't five dollars' worth in that house, outside the furnishings."

"That reminds me—I was thinking of it when I was locking the stuff up—that reminds me of a feller down on the Gold Coast, away back in—lemme see—"

He ran his fingers through the thick shock of hair and hummed for a moment.

"Well, it was the April Nick Corrigan tried to drive a spear through me and got a six-foot box for his pains, anyway," he reflected. "I'll tell you about it, Robby. We'd had a pretty good season—that was the year I worked with Henry Doblin—we'd had a pretty good year and pretty exciting, the way it always is when you have to quit work every fifteen minutes and blow the head off some blamed native in the bush. But we got along nicely and—"

Perhaps the meanest form of impoliteness is listening with an attentive smile and thinking of something miles removed from the speaker at the same time.

Broadly speaking, the momentary Cabinet of Santa Chanza were a well-mannered trio; yet at the moment each of the three lost the thread of the good captain's narrative in thoughts of his own.

Vaguely, to be sure, they were aware of shovels rattling down through the decades and the swish of precious sand in the gold-pans and the incessant popping of firearms; vaguely, too, they assimilated disjointed de-

tails of assault, murder, arson, and larceny, given and taken promiscuously on the happy Gold Coast.

Yet dark night was upon them at the end of the tale, and they became simultaneously aware of the electric lights and of Captain Velvet's:

"And that's what he got, damn him!"

"And it served him right, I'm sure!" the Minister of State agreed absently.

"I always serve 'em right, Robby," the captain added, unexpectedly. "I never served any one wrong yet. If a feller's a good friend o' mine, I'd shoot down his last enemy for him—and if a feller tries to get the best o' me, I never rest till I've given him all he needs, and good and plenty!"

He leaned back and yawned comfortably.

A whistling little sigh escaped Mr. Evans. His lips were working nervously, too, and his hands twitched.

"We'd better—go on with the Cabinet meeting?" he suggested.

"Better have a bite to eat first," the captain said kindly. "These here hotels in Relampago don't amount to much. I've told Bentino to bring in a little snack, and—here he is."

The chief of secret police entered breathlessly and rather strangely, too, for he had acquired a sweeping mustache, a long goatee, and a hat several sizes too large since his exit.

He bore packages, and he laid them on the presidential desk with:

"It is, I think, safe. In the disguise I have not been recognized."

Captain Velvet looked at him sharply and projected fifteen seconds of wholly unintelligible Spanish in his direction.

The chief of secret police glanced covertly at the Cabinet and replied even more cryptically, removing his mustache with a twitch of one hand and his goatee with a twitch of the other, and waving both in an inexplicable apologetic manner.

He concluded with a violent shrug; and the captain barked a sharp half dozen words and watched Bentino back out before he said heartily:

"Here it is—crackers and cheese and some nice jam, too. Yes, and he got some tamales, I see, and—"

"Yes, about six days old!" the Brute submitted discourteously. "Hey! Is the credit of this administration so

rotten a man has to put on a false face to—"

He paused, for the good captain drowned his rude words in a roar of hearty merriment.

He wound up by patting William Ryan's arm and extending a cracker-box as he said:

"It isn't as bad as that, Bill. Benny's just a little native detective and he has to have his disguise or quit. He—that was funny, wasn't it?"

"It struck me funny, too!" the Snake said forcefully. "I—"

Captain Velvet grinned complacently at him and drove his excellent teeth through an impromptu sandwich.

"I'll tell you a funnier one than that, Jimmy," he stated, from somewhere behind. "This was something that happened on the ragged edge of Papua, when—sit down!"

He waved to the official leather chairs and chuckled happily.

"Out there they eat men, you know—"

It was, doubtless, an excellent story and thoroughly appetizing; yet again they failed to absorb its full charm.

Eating mechanically, yet conscientiously enough since it appeared that legitimate dinner was not to appear very soon, they pondered their own problem so deeply that seconds passed unnoticed after the story's conclusion before:

"Well, didn't that strike you funny?" from the captain.

Robert Pollard laughed spasmodically.

"It's a scream!" he stated inanely.

"I don't usually tell these funny stories in business hours, but that one was too good to keep," the president *pro tem.* informed them blandly as he swept away the crumbs. "Now, we won't ask you to work evenings often, but I am going to request you to keep on the job to-night, and I'll see you get a little extra for it."

"The idea being that we just go back there and make a bluff at having a Cabinet meeting, huh?" the Brute inquired.

"That's absolutely all you have to do for to-night, Bill," said the captain, skirting near the truth with a honeyed smile. "The city's a little upset and people want to feel that we're working overtime to straighten out everything. And they're perfectly justified, boys," he continued. "They're paying

us big wages to do it, and we'll have to give 'em something for their money. Some of the newspaper folks may be in, and if they are, just send to me for an interpreter and say that everything's lovely, and by day after tomorrow everything'll be lovelier still.

"Say that living's coming down about sixty per cent and all the dishonest politicians are in jail or on the way—and say it right, if you have to."

He beamed approval at them and watched them walk, calmly enough, to the corridor.

Bentino, just without, started nervously—and smiled and closed the door for them—and made some sort of sign to the several faces that appeared, mysteriously as before, in the main entrance.

The faces vanished and a certain determined quality came into Robert Pollard's tread as he hurried into the Cabinet room and waited for them to follow.

And there they looked at one another in silence for some five seconds before the Brute's snarled:

"Well, the old guy's trimmed us again!"

"Nobody could prevent his sending his own stuff to safety," Pollard said bitterly, "but I wish he'd waited another week. Well—that's all off, and maybe it's just as well. We'd have run big risks trying to clean out his house, anyway."

"I'm willing to forget it," the Snake put in, suspending his feast of underlip for a moment, "but what's so queer about this house?"

"That's what I'm thinking of, Snake," confessed the chief. "Why aren't there people around here?"

"There are, out on the front porch—a dozen of 'em!" Mr. Ryan contributed. "They stick in their faces when they hear a step and that little comedy cop waves 'em off again."

"And why did we have to eat dinner here and chew up a lot of stale crackers when we passed three good hotels walking up from—" injected the Snake.

"And if it comes to that, what sort of dump is it where a man has to put on false whiskers to buy food—and what did he mean when he said it was safe and he hadn't been recognized?" the Brute inquired further. "And then again—"

"Stop that shouting, Bill!" com-

manded Mr. Pollard, with lips that were not quite so ruddy as usual. "That doesn't help any. There's something all wrong here. I didn't spot it before, in the excitement, but it's here fast enough. What is it?"

Again they stared at one another for a little; and the Snake produced the one sound conclusion.

"Whatever it is," he said hoarsely, "we're the goats!"

"Not necessarily," Pollard snapped. "We — confound it! Who *does* know?"

"Robby," said the Brute, and tapped his guiding intelligence upon the shoulder, "that shrimp of ours knows, if we had him here. That little guy out in the hall knows, too."

"And he's nearer," said the Minister of State, with a sudden smile. "Wait a minute."

He glanced in the mirror and examined the smile—it was good, but not quite magnetic enough.

He permitted it to broaden and to glow friendliness; and when it satisfied him he took it to the door and turned its rays down the corridor upon Bentino as he called:

"Oh—you there!"

The chief of secret police started and saluted.

"The excellency will desire me?"

"Just for a moment, if you please," the Minister of State said sweetly. "Can you come in here?"

He stood back as the chief approached and permitted him to enter; he locked the door again and slipped the key into his pocket.

"Bentino," said the Minister of State, "just what's wrong in this town?"

"But nothing, excellency," Bentino responded in astonishment.

"In this palacio, then?"

"Even less than nothing, excellency," said the chief.

"Everything's peaceful and happy? There is no danger at all, of any kind?" Mr. Pollard purred on.

The chief of secret police expanded his chest and prepared for oratory.

"Excellency," he said impressively, "peace reigns supreme in all our native land. Happiness rests like a beautiful bird upon all of Relampago, bestowing upon great and small, upon rich and poor, her benefactions. At last tyranny has been driven from Santa Chanza. To you, excellencies—"

"Well, that's just tiresome," snapped Mr. Pollard as he clutched Bentino's throat in a fashion discovered and perfected in the palmy days of Hell's Kitchen.

It was really a wonderful grip. It clipped Bentino's speech as shears might have clipped a running tape.

More, it lifted the chief of secret police from his feet and laid him, from the waist up, along the Cabinet's table; and as he stretched there the Minister of State permitted his fingers to tighten a little as he leaned close and hissed:

"Bentino, I'm going to ease up a little on these fingers. If you let out just one little peep, they'll come down again and I'll twist your lying little head off and throw it out the window. Understand that?"

Half an inch the official head managed to bob in acquiescence, while the eyes protruded toward Mr. Pollard.

"Just one wail or one wriggle and you're done, Benny!" the Minister of State repeated. "Now, what's wrong here?"

"It is—as nothing, excellency," choked the chief of secret police. "A mere threatened—assassination!"

"Whose?"

"Yours, excellency."

"What?" shrieked the Minister of Finance. "Are they trying to get him?"

"And you, excellency—and the other excellency," Bentino bubbled.

"Velvet himself is trying to do this?" Mr. Pollard asked thickly.

"But never!" cried his victim. "In all the world, he desires most that you exist to be his Cabinet. And for the rest, it is nothing, excellency. I—I and my men—we shall prevent and protect and—"

"Never mind your end of it. Who's at the bottom of it?"

The chief of police gurgled dismally over his third good breath.

"In our stricken city there are factions unfriendly to the beloved Señor Pacato, excellency," he said. "They threaten—they plot—they would kill gladly—"

"And that's why there was no Cabinet here when we arrived?" Pollard asked quickly.

"It is so!"

"Were they—murdered?" the Minister of State inquired, with some difficulty.

"Of a certainty, no!" said Bentino, with a ghastly little smile from his table. "They have executed judicious previous resignations."

The Minister of Finance's mind, always abnormally keen, grew even morbidly active.

He gripped the chief's lean arm and demanded:

"At a guess, nobody in the whole blasted country would take the jobs, hey? That's why *we* got 'em?"

"The excellency speaks with the tongue of great knowledge," confessed the chief of secret police. "Yet be without fear! I am here, excellencies—I, Bentino! Each door is guarded faithfully. When you walk abroad an army shall surround you, each man—"

The Minister of State jerked him from the table.

"Listen!" he commanded. "If you want to die quick, go in and tell Velvet what I've done to you!"

"Excellency!" Bentino smiled bitterly, as he felt all the way around his throat. "Did he but know that I have communicated the truth to you, your labor would be spared—for he is a just man, but merciless. But remain unafraid, ex—"

"Get out of here!" snarled the Minister of State as he jabbed the key into the door.

The portal he jerked open, too, and directed a vicious swing at the unhappy secret investigator as he passed like a flash of light.

An instant, as he struck the opposite wall of the corridor, he turned to glare at the Minister of State—and then the door had closed and that high dignity of Santa Chanza was facing his somewhat paler friends and crying:

"Well, he got us, after all! He got us like rats in a trap, the—"

His voice failed him for a moment; Mr. Pollard, in fact, turned crimson with uncontrollable fury.

His clenched, shaking hands rose above his well-shaped head and he choked: "The old hound fooled me—and I thought I had him right that time. But I'll get him! I'll get him just as sure as—"

"I wouldn't yell about it just now, Robby," said the Minister of Finance hoarsely. "We know now what he meant when he said he always handed it back to his enemies."

"Yes, and what are we going to do?" Mr. Ryan asked, more prac-

tically, as his scared eyes roved the line of dark windows.

A last terrific effort and Robert Pollard's vibrating being came under control.

"We're going to empty that treasury and leave with the bundle, by its back window, inside of two minutes!" he said lucidly. "If that little dub of a detective's out there, we'll snatch him up and lock him in the vault, and—"

"And then right out of the country?" the Snake asked feverishly.

"As straight as—" the Minister of State began fiercely—and stopped.

In the corridor there seemed to be a small commotion; it subsided almost immediately and light steps pattered to the door of the Cabinet room, and the door opened.

Zarapa, the graftless dwarf, stood before them, hatless, breathless, with hands waving irresponsibly.

"*Señor!*" he said to Robert Pollard. "That I might have died before this moment!"

"What?"

"Listen!" commanded his first assistant.

They did it readily enough. Heads bent, they strained their ears; and there was small enough need for the straining.

All too distinctly they caught the steady tramp, tramp, tramp of many feet and the distant murmur of many voices; and the murmur rose to an ominous growl and died to a rumble again.

"They are coming!" the First Assistant announced. "They—the mob!"

"Coming for what?" rasped the Minister of Finance.

The first aid to the State Department wrung his hands in a heart-broken fashion that was most disturbing.

"For you, señors!" he cried.

## CHAPTER IX.

PAID IN FULL.

THE pleasing thing would be to relate how, with the perfectly substantial mob at hand, the real, steel-sheathed grit in Robert Pollard and his friends came to the surface—how they clasped hands in a grim farewell, and then, back to back, fought like demons until the anti-Pacato ranks



were decimated and the bleeding remnant shrieked for quarter—how, thereafter, respected by Captain Velvet, idolized by the proletariat, they renounced crime forever and settled down to live and die as solid citizens of the little republic.

But since the purely pleasing is rarely the possible, be it noted that, as one man, the Cabinet of Santa Chanza turned pale; and the Minister of State, gripping the infinitesimal Zarapa and shaking him violently, cried:

"What d'ye mean, they're coming for us?"

The First Assistant stifled a noisy wheeze of terror.

"That and nothing else, *señor!*"

"But—"

"See!" The little man looked longingly toward his closet for an instant. "I have been abroad. I have attended to many details. Even now the servants of the unspeakable Velvet are riding their mules madly down the coast; even now his execrable kitchen reeks with sleeping potions; even now, I say, the swiftest automobile in all Santa Chanza will—"

Without—and to the best of their judgment not farther away than the opposite side of the parked square—the inconvenient mob elevated its voice again.

Distantly some one howled a strange Spanish phrase; a thousand voices took it up and howled as well—and then the tramp, tramp came nearer.

"Damn Velvet and his stuff!" the Minister of State panted. "What about *this*? Did he start it?"

"He? But no!" Zarapa laughed, with a hideous quaver. "This, *señor*, which comes, is the army!"

"The army!"

"I have listened," the little man went on quickly. "I have heard enough; I came to warn you—too late, perhaps. The whole army has risen—ten thousand men. Agitators of Sanchez have stirred the officers to fury, goaded the men to desperation. Sanchez has promised them full pay—"

The Minister of War came to the front suddenly, so thoroughly upset by the sinister noises in the night that he lurched into the duties of his exalted office.

"What's this about the army getting paid?" he demanded indignantly. "Ain't I paying 'em enough now?"

"*Señor*," said Zarapa, and looked genuine compassion at William Ryan from his wicked little eyes, "you have not paid them for three long, hungry years!"

"Why don't they come and talk it over quietly, then?" their ostensible head asked wildly.

And at that point sheer fright hushed him and caused the Cabinet to draw close together, for under the very walls of the palacio had risen a roar that would have made the howling of a wolf-pack seem musical.

A moment or two, and it dropped away, and one voice spoke—a loud, rough voice that had little to say, and said it in few words.

There was a pause as the owner of the voice concluded; and then a muttering, and after that, for several frightful seconds, complete silence that seemed even more ominous.

Voices, for the time, left the dreadful night; the sound of feet took their place.

Some shuffled; some walked restlessly; from the main entrance of the palacio came the sharp click, click of several pairs of heels, ascending with military precision; and Zarapa brightened slightly.

"Strange!" he muttered. "But they have not yet fired the palacio! It was that they proposed, *señors*, when I heard—that and the shooting of yourselves as you jumped from the windows!"

The clicking of the heels stopped at the entrance and moved uncertainly. In the Cabinet room they seemed to hear Bentino's tones for a moment, shrilly; they heard his step—and then, sharply, Captain Velvet's large voice and a slam of his door.

After which the click, click, click was resumed, straight down the corridor to the door of the Cabinet's room.

Given a comfortable fireside, a pipe, and plenty of time, almost any one can devise to the finest detail his escape from a hypothetical blazing hotel or a roaring lion.

Only the extraordinary man can contrive to back gracefully away from the real thing at three or four seconds' warning; and it appeared that Santa Chanza's Cabinet was not composed of extraordinary men just then, for they merely stood and, eyes glued to the expensive panel work of the entrance, shook!

Uncertainty, of course, was almost absent from the proposition, yet they found no comfort in the fact.

They might flee by the windows, if they chose, and take whatever the amiable horde below had to offer; or they might wait as they were until the horde's obvious delegation walked in and, presumably, escorted them forth to whatever sort of *auto da fé* the quaint customs of the country decreed fitting for undesired ministers.

In any event, it was plain that Captain Velvet had retired from the field in good order, and that his powerful, popular personality would in no way distract attention from themselves as star actors—and when they had worked so far through a painful mental haze, the door opened.

There was no rush in either direction.

In fact, but for his pallor, Bentino might have been a grinning page, ushering in ordinary visitors; they caught his uncanny smile for an instant as the three callers entered. They backed away a pace or two, did the Cabinet; and then they paused.

For a little, at least, physical attack was not meditated. The round, little man with the bloodthirsty mustaches strode straight to the center of the room and stopped short.

Behind him, two tall, lean men marched, stopping when he stopped, and peering savagely at their country's Cabinet—and while various sartorial touches indicated that the two might possibly be officers of some sort, there was no doubt at all about the round man.

His coat bore some six or seven pounds of gold braid that had glistened brightly in the dear long ago; his head, still covered, boasted possibly the most unique cocked hat in the universe; a long sword rattled at his side, and one hand even wore a glove, some time white, but mellowed by time and dust to a becoming gray.

"It is Abipo!" muttered the first assistant Minister of State, with real awe.

Mr. Pollard drew breath.

"Who?"

"Manuelo Abipo, the general, *señor*! commander-in-chief of our entire army!" said his aid.

A moment the commander seared Zarapa with his fiery eye and cleared his throat explosively.

The pair behind leaned forward with sudden attention for the words to come, and the commander-in-chief barked just once at the first assistant.

Zarapa recoiled a little and rubbed his hands; and then, almost imperceptibly, his eyes slanted toward William Ryan and looked straight ahead again.

Brief though the glance, it seemed to be all the commander required. One side step and he arrived directly in front of the Minister of War and the lean pair fell into position directly behind him.

Again he cleared his throat and saluted majestically—and sudden anger caused the Minister of War to regain some of his composure, for he demanded:

"Say! Is this thing trying to kid me?"

"He salutes, *señor*," Zarapa suggested gently.

And he was doing more than salute now. Head thrown back, the commander-in-chief of Santa Chanza's army spoke sonorously and slowly at first, but with subdued dramatic effect.

A minute and his tone had risen, and the utterly meaningless flow was rippling more swiftly.

Another, and each new point accompanied by a thrilling gesture, he was working to the climax of the speech—and it came in a roar that would have done credit to any grand opera barytone, and the commander relaxed and looked William Ryan straight in the eye.

Plainly, however little the Minister of War might suspect the fact, he had driven in a collection of absolutely unanswerable arguments.

"Was he talking to me?" the Minister of War asked blankly.

"He was delivering the message of the army, *señor*," Zarapa said with some haste; "or the first part of it, at any rate. He says, *señor*, that he is at best a poor speaker, having consecrated his life to war and the eternal battle for freedom which brave men like himself are called upon to fight for their countries. He says that his youth was spent in learning the voice of the guns, *señor*, and that he is no master of flowery speech; but that, poor agent though he may be of an afflicted army, he will—"

The commander-in-chief had re-

gained breath and was speaking again, rather more loudly, it seemed, by way of drowning out Zarapa.

He went at it in earnest this time, too; stepping very close to William Ryan and shouting meaningless words into his face in the most discourteous fashion; he stood away and threw his hands aloft, and then, dropping his voice by degrees, lowered the hands simultaneously until they reached the level of his knees, when he executed a strange, guttural growl for all of fifteen seconds.

It was not quite the end, for the commander folded his arms across his reasonably mighty chest and blistered his minister with the gaze of an utterly outraged man as he thundered out a last solid minute of dramatic Spanish.

And then, as a balloon which has done its full duty and deliberately punctured itself with a pin, the commander relaxed altogether and turned to mutter with his aides, leaning on his sword with one hand, twirling his mustaches with the other.

Robert Pollard had sufficient assurance to produce a faint smile, but Zarapa nipped it in the bud with:

"It is not to laugh, *señor*! You have quite understood?"

"No."

"He says that the army has suffered long and patiently without one cent of pay; he says that two years ago they were paid in full with government promissory notes, which the Cabinet officially declared illegal a little later—and that last year they were paid with a special issue of government bonds.

"He says, *señor*, that since no one would buy the bonds in other countries, even the government here which issued them concluded that they must be worthless, and refused to redeem them—and that thus the suffering soldiers have seen no money for a period so long that their families are starving!"

"Was that all?" inquired the Minister of War.

"By no means, *señor*. He said that now the end has come and he can no longer control his troops. They demand full pay for all of the last three years, and that failing, they promise to eliminate from Santa Chanza a government so perfidious. It is to pay instantly or die, *señor*—that is what he said at the last, and I fear—"

The First Assistant Minister of State relapsed into silence with a heavy sigh and shrugged his shoulders in a really dismal fashion; yet his depression was not communicated to the head of his department.

Mr. Pollard, in fact, shot a quick and rather cheerful glance at William Ryan, and both glanced at the Snake.

With one impulse they turned and walked to the farther side of the room as Mr. Pollard said curtly:

"Find out how much he wants for the whole army, Zarapa."

The first assistant reeled.

"The most elevated *señor* would pay from his personal pocket?" he gasped.

"In a sense," said Mr. Pollard briefly, "this Cabinet's going into session now to talk it over."

And he turned to William Ryan with: "Well?"

"Don't put it up to me," the Minister of War said warmly. "I never saw the army before, let alone owe it money!"

"I'm not putting it up to you; I'm putting it up to the Minister of Finance, I suppose," Mr. Pollard grinned.

"Shall we do it?"

"Pay 'em off?" the Snake asked unhappily.

"Yes!"

"It'll make an awful hole in the treasury, Robby, if they want too much," the Minister of Finance said with commendable caution. "I tell you, I'd been figuring on a full five millions to take back and—"

"Well, they'll make an awful mess of us if they don't get it, however much they may want," the Minister of State said, "and we're going to do it. And if it comes down to that, thank Heaven we *can* do it!"

The Minister of War sighed too.

"Maybe there's some reason why they shouldn't be paid?" he said lamely. "Maybe it's a rotten army, anyway, and not worth getting paid. With all that good coin locked up—"

"I think I've got that bundle of money properly tagged," said the Minister of State. "I imagine that it's some sort of emergency reserve fund that they've kept tucked away for extreme need of some kind—and they've probably kept some kind of unwritten law about leaving it where it is.

"Anyway, it's *there*," he concluded with profound satisfaction, "and a lit-

tle of it's going to keep us above ground instead of below, and—"

He broke off at the sound of the approaching Zarapa.

The First Assistant Minister of State seemed able to move at nothing better than a shuffle; his small shoulders bowed and his hands dangled loosely.

He came to his chief much in the style of a badly beaten cur and spoke in a thin, small voice:

"It is, as you say, the finish, *señor*! It was in my hope that they could hear the voice of reason, but this is not so. In the army are, all told, two hundred and fifty companies. Each company, *señor*, for officers and men, demands four thousand dollars! It is—a—million—dollars that they ask!" breathed the first assistant, and sagged limply toward his chief.

Across the big room the commander and his personal staff seemed astonished at the new Minister of State and his manner of hearing their joint death-warrant. Mr. Pollard merely drew himself up and nodded calmly to his assistant.

"Four thousand dollars a company, eh?"

"Abipo says it!"

"Each company has a captain?" the Minister of State asked crisply.

"I suppose so, *señor*," said Zarapa, and looked up wonderingly. "Why?"

"You'll go straight to that important little fool over there and tell him to line up his wretched captains outside, Zarapa!" Mr. Pollard ordered. "Tell him that within ten minutes I will give the word and they may file through this room, each man taking the money for his own company and handing me his personal receipt!"

He shot a wintry glance at the commander, who stared.

"Tell him also that the Minister of War had contemplated doubling the pay of all officers to-morrow, and that having listened to his speech this will not be done. Hustle!"

The First Assistant Minister of State crossed the room like a man in a dream, yet the man was certainly not Zarapa.

His shoulders had squared-phenomenally; he looked the commander-in-chief up and down with contempt and spoke sharply; he ended, even, by snapping his fingers in the fiery Abipo's very mustache—and then he leaned on the table and watched with

cold interest as all three officers spoke at once and to each other, hands waving, voices soaring.

They turned, in half a minute, and bowed low to the Cabinet; they stood erect and marched out of the room—and a wild, new light spattered from Robert Pollard's eye.

"I've got it now!" he said tensely. "Let's get that money and I'll tell you in the treasury vault."

He turned and strode straight from the apartment, with the Ministers of War and Finance following silently.

A lonely pair of incandescents, burning in the corridor, shone on them for an instant and then permitted the smaller passage to shroud them in kindly darkness; and in the gloom Mr. Pollard fumbled through the treasury keys and chuckled insanely.

The main door opened and was bolted behind them; the vault door opened and he dived for the far compartment and selected two of the packages of money; and with half a million dollars under either arm he spoke in the manner of a rapid-fire gun:

"Bill! Snake! We've got this country tied up in a bundle and all ready to move. It never struck me till just that instant. When we've paid that rabble in full they'll be handling the first real money they've seen in three years and we'll be the most popular people in the whole republic! Get it?"

"No," confessed the Minister of War.

"When we've got the army, we've got the country! Once that army's paid off, I'm going to be president!"

"Good night!" gasped the Minister of Finance.

"It's the hot climate that's got him!" the Minister of War said brokenly. "Robby, for the love o' Mike, if your head hurts—"

"I'm going to be president, and I'm going to put the rollers under Velvet so fast that he'll never know when he started to slide—and he'll never stop till doomsday! I'm some cussed little payer of grudges myself, and when I get all done with him I'll sleep all night every night with a grin from one ear to the other," the Minister of State said serenely as he locked the compartment and laughed aloud.

"Come on. Let's fix things for the dance before the music gets there!"

A mere spectator must have ad-

mired Robert Pollard's mien as he returned to the Cabinet chamber, for it was the mien of a brave man.

Head up, he smiled placid good cheer; and the smile broadened suddenly at the sound of a shout from the mob without.

There was no mistaking the quality of that last outburst; it was approval and nothing else, and his vivid imagination identified it instantly as the first of many thousand similar shouts in the time to come.

It was a large situation, and he appropriated it with a total disregard of any rights the Minister of Finance might possess.

Zarapa he stationed at the door, by way of regulating the line that was already forming at the main entrance, and the little man shook and giggled hysterically at the turn of affairs and the pile of bank-notes upon the table. To the last one, they were of the thousand dollar denomination, and Mr. Pollard plunged headlong into them, picking off piles of four, counting them and laying them aside and counting further piles.

And when fifty or so lay ready, and the Snake, in a trance state, sorted out other dozens of little piles, Mr. Pollard signaled to his first assistant and called:

"One at a time! Ready!"

The door opened and a queer man entered—a lean man, with hungry eyes, who clutched his heart as he darted forward to the table.

The Minister of State spoke briskly:

"Captain? Here's yours. Is that paper your receipt? Give it to me and get out! Next!"

He pushed the lean man aside and watched the new lean man enter and go through much the same performance. This one, to be sure, halted and gasped for a moment, and the Minister of State rapped out:

"Move that fellow right along here, Zarapa! Tell that first one to get out! We can't give up the whole night to this job. Get 'em going!"

The first assistant obeyed. Hardly a minute and they were "going."

Entering not more than a dozen yards apart, strange, lean, unshaven Santa Chanzans, some in uniform, more in almost any sort of raiment; some with guns and some without, straggled into the Cabinet room,

crossed it, received each his little pile and moved on again. Twenty of them had been paid, and then thirty; and now, as Mr. Pollard turned for a new supply of money he noted that a fifth of the army had received its pay and he laughed gently:

"Velvet's put some big ones over, but he never came within a mile of this!"

He winked at the Minister of War and then ceased smiling.

"Well, what the devil's wrong?"

"I was only wondering, Robby, what happened to the cheers?" Mr. Ryan said oddly.

"What?"

"The first three that went out of here started a riot!" muttered the Minister of War. "They weren't outside before the rest started cheering and howling; after that they put the soft pedal on the cheers and this last two dozen's started a growl—every darned one of 'em!"

"Nonsense!" said the Minister of State.

"Is it?" asked the Minister of War. "Listen!"

He put up a finger and the Minister of State turned toward the window in genuine astonishment, for in the open air a snarl was rising, rumbling and ominous as before.

It grew, too, to a rattling roar and—

"If it comes down to that, where's the rest of your captains?" the Snake asked swiftly. "*What became of the line?*"

From the doorway Zarapa turned bewildered.

"One does not comprehend!" he stated. "There is not, as says the American, one man-jack without, where two minutes back a solid hundred stood and jested!"

"Is that—corridor empty?" Mr. Pollard stammered.

"It is—" began his first assistant; and then amended:—"not!"

For dozens of heels were rattling on the noisy tiles now, and they were headed for that center of interest, the Cabinet room.

They stopped with a shuffling slide and the door burst open.

Abipo, commander-in-chief, thudded into the room and across the rug, and behind him pounded a score of wild-eyed men.

Wild-voiced they were, too, for they all chattered at once; and, for the mat-

ter of that, wild-handed; above their heads, clutching fingers of various shades of brown waved the gold-tinted money of Santa Chanza.

Abipo himself had garnered quite a remarkable collection of the wealth; he shook it at Robert Pollard and grew downright impolite, for he spat upon it and hurled it at Robert Pollard's feet.

And then, through the center of them, a too familiar figure forced its way. Captain Velvet thundered over to the table and the men beside it as he cried:

"What is it? What devilment have you started now?"

The Minister of State eyed him coldly.

"I'm paying off the army," he stated.

With every breath a snort the captain restrained himself and pointed to the pile of wealth upon the table, and the quiet in his veins was terrible.

"With that?" he demanded.

"With that money, which hasn't been out of your treasury for more than ten minutes," Mr. Pollard said, with crisp contempt. "It's the first visible sign of honesty and square dealing that your unlucky army has seen from this wretched little country in three—"

"You!" thundered Captain Velvet. "Wasn't there trouble enough here without this? Weren't things badly enough upset without trying to fool them with that waste paper?"

"Waste paper?" wheezed from the Minister of Finance.

"Yes, waste paper!" the president *pro tem* repeated obligingly. "That's a batch of bills we turned down five years ago because the engraving was too bad—that's a style of bill that was never even issued."

For the moment he lost himself completely and shook both fists in Robert Pollard's rigid countenance.

"That ain't money!" Captain Velvet screamed furiously. "That's just trash the janitor forgot to throw out."

the Cabinet table and stared stupidly at the president *pro tem*.

Ordinary shocks, the Minister of State could endure in a fashion quite debonair; but having handed himself an entire empire and relinquished it, all in a matter of ten or twelve minutes, he stood petrified, thunderstruck! "Isn't—money?" he choked.

"No, and—"

"But it is money! You're crazy!" rasped the Minister of State and shook his head to clear the numbed brain.

"We took it from—"

"I know where you took it, and I'm not crazy, by a long shot!" said Captain Velvet, grimly calm again. "We had fifteen million dollars' worth of that stuff made up by an engraver down here years ago, and he made just sixteen mistakes in the plate. We rejected it, and I supposed the blasted stuff had been burned up years ago. Well?"

His hard eyes glinted as he waited for Mr. Pollard's answer.

The Minister of State reached uncertainly for one of his cherished thousand-dollar notes and tried to study it; and ignorant as he might be of Spanish, it took no more than ten seconds to discover that, badly done from one end to the other, the wretched thing was not even signed!

"Say! What did you mean by turning that stage money over to me, then?" the Snake demanded thinly. "I've got a reputation, and—"

"Not the kind any one can damage, Jimmy," Captain Velvet said candidly. "And I didn't turn anything over to you: I made you Minister of Finance. There hasn't been ten cents in the national treasury for two years, so far as I know!"

Mr. Pollard's wits, at least, were returning.

"And yet you hired us, you crooked old—"

Captain Velvet's remarkable eye halted him abruptly; yet the captain's smile, small and unpleasant, was actually bored.

"I hired you three because I owed you a favor or two, and I guess we won't stand here and discuss morals just now," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"About what?"

"About paying—well, *your* army?" said the captain, as he turned to the Minister of War.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WHEEL OF FATE.

A FILM, sickening, semiopaque, dropped before Robert Pollard's eyes. His gaze turned glassy.

He claved weakly at the edge of



Mr. Ryan looked what he felt, which was cold-blooded, violent murder.

"Say! If this room wasn't packed with your friends—" he began.

"Just a minute!" said the president *pro tem*, and turned to the gathering.

A sentence or two he spoke to them, quietly and reassuringly. The commander, removing his hat, bowed low and issued an order; and his committee turned and departed, closing the door behind them, as Captain Velvet turned back to his Minister of War with:

"Well, Bill? They're gone?"

"Yes, and we're gone!" thundered the Minister of War. "And so long as we'd like to have your company where we're going—"

"Wait, Bill!" commanded the Minister of State with white lips, as he stepped between them. "There's nothing to be gained by trying to thrash him, with his entire army under the windows."

He directed glowering eyes at the good captain.

"Well, you got us into it. How are you going to get us out of it?"

"Out of it, Robby?" smiled Captain Velvet. "By ginger, I dunno! They were pretty wrathful before, but they're plumb crazy now."

His smile oozed plain, polite apology and a total lack of concern.

"Y' see, Robby," he explained, "this army's been put off with promises for a long time. As near as I can figure, they'd have stood promises for another six months, anyway, till we'd had time to raise some cash and give 'em enough to worry along on."

"But this thing of trying to hand 'em bad bills in that barefaced way—I dunno, Robby!" repeated the captain, and yawned.

Outdoors not less than four individual voices were addressing the multitude.

A wild, blood-freezing cheer answered one of them, even as the company in the Cabinet room listened; a mean, low growl came from another section—and Captain Velvet shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess you've done it now!" he said ruefully. "I'm glad I wasn't mixed up in it."

"But you—"

"Robby, I didn't do a solitary thing I have to reproach myself with!" Captain Velvet informed him solemn-

ly. "I—just acted for what seemed the best, and I must say I looked to you to do a little better than this. But it's done now, and you boys'll have to talk it over and find the best way to quiet 'em down."

"I'm going back to my own work now," the captain concluded. "There's too much for one president to do as it is, without shouldering all the Cabinet work, too."

He nodded amiably at them and turned and sauntered toward the door—and they stood and watched him, motionless.

Hand on knob, he turned to smile again.

"I told Abipo you'd have some real money for 'em inside of one hour," he said pleasantly and perfunctorily. "They might possibly be able to hold 'em off that long, but—I dunno, I'm sure. You can't tell, down here in Santa Chanza."

And he was gone.

Stunned, they heard him lounge down the tiling—heard him pause and speak to some one—heard a confused muttering of voices answer him, and then heard the door of the presidential office close.

Quite justified, of course, by reason of his own official burdens, the good captain had left them to settle their slight problem as pleased them best.

"You can't tell—down here in Santa Chanza!" the Minister of Finance echoed in stifled, far-away tones.

"No, but *he* can tell!" the Minister of War cried bitterly. "If I had him—"

The pale Minister of State looked up from a brief examination of a rug pattern he would remember to his dying day; and albeit his eyes suggested the wild animal at bay, backed into a corner and waiting, there was an aura of unearthly calm about him.

"There's nothing to be gained in worrying about him, damn him!" he said. "Our job's to get out of here alive."

The Minister of War smiled with ghastly humor.

"That's a rich man's job, Robby," he said brokenly. "It'd cost us a million dollars."

"It needn't," Mr. Pollard said shortly. "Look out and see if that mob's as thick as before, Jim."

Turned obliging for the moment, the mob spared the Minister of Finance

his pains; it rumbled like distant thunder and crackled back to silence as he turned toward the window, and Mr. Pollard, nodding, hurried across to the door and laid an ear against the panel.

"The corridor's packed!" he said.

"And even if it wasn't, the porch sounds kind of jammed," the Minister of Finance added.

"I wasn't thinking of that. It struck me that we might make some sort of bluff at getting real money for them from the Treasury, if there weren't too many around, and then drop out the window in there."

He frowned and peered about in sudden astonishment.

"Where's Zarapa?"

"Where the rats go when the ship sinks, Robby," said the Minister of War.

Mr. Pollard's lips pursed.

"That's funny," he said. "I thought—"

His ear returned abruptly to the panel and he listened again, and then stepped away hurriedly, muttering.

What might well be their last earthly hour of seclusion was evidently to be ruptured, for without haste or hesitation or undue force the knob of the Cabinet room turned slowly.

The door, swinging open a few inches, revealed the several dozen pairs of fierce, peering eyes beyond, and admitted the diminutive Zarapa.

Outside, to be sure, some thousands were at a pitch of frenzy; in the Cabinet room stood three occasionally desperate men whose hearts stood still at every sound, whose blood trickled ice at every new shout.

The room, in fact, was the very center of an emotional cyclone; and yet Zarapa walked in lightly as any dancing master, smiled at them, drew the cigarette from his lips, and locked the door.

"In the outward surge I disappeared inadvertently, having been caught upon Abipo's sword," he said pleasantly. "I have returned."

The same light steps took him to the Minister of State, and he held up a newspaper, fresh and ink.

"And with this," he pursued. "It is to be feared that danger is at hand!"

They stared their wonder at him; Zarapa flicked the ash from his cigarette quite nonchalantly.

"*El Sol*," he explained as he spread

the sheet. "It is the organ of Sanchez, señors, and, these last two days, issues special editions at five minute intervals, as it would appear. Even now they are circulating the news of the most unfortunate money matter."

Mr. Pollard laughed harshly.

"It's too late to hurt us, anyway," he observed.

"Be not too fully assured, señor," the little man said gravely, plainly missing the sinister sense of the remark. "See! Here are the alleged facts, called by Sanchez the crowning outrage of Santa Chanza's suffering. He details them in seventeen different ways, I think, each more contorted than its predecessor. This section he heads 'The Disease.' Here—'The Remedy.'"

"Just those two or three lines?" the Snake asked with faint interest.

"Even so, señor," said the First Assistant Minister of State. "He urges that history be besmirched again with a triple assassination; he specifies yourselves and urges the populace to rise. They are rising!"

Outdoors a savage scream split the early night.

Indoors its echo came from three throats as a time-worn musket hurtled through the pane of the end window and clattered to the floor.

"Señors," said Zarapa with deep conviction, "it is time to go and—"

"Yes, and get out!" Mr. Pollard ordered. "You're a pretty good little sport, and nobody seems to want your blood at least. Slide out that door while you can and we'll do—"

The First Assistant was not even listening.

Briskly he stepped to the side of the room and opened his closet; briskly, too, he laid a hand upon one of its hooks and caused the back to open; and he turned and said simply:

"This way, señors, and with a little haste!" and he indicated the yawning blackness beyond.

One tremendous second the Cabinet of Santa Chanza blinked uncomprehendingly at the First Assistant Minister of State; another and they leaped madly across the room, gazed at the dark square in which Zarapa's cigarette glowed faintly, and stepped through after him.

It was a still, dark room they had entered. A yard or two away the little man's voice said placidly:

"Merely the office of that minister who first employed me, *señors*. He was a cautious man—for which reason he still lives happily, far from here. There is no furniture. This way, *señors*, to the cellar."

Hinges creaked. The brief flicker of a match in the First Assistant's hand showed a panel of the wall lying flat upon the floor, with a yard-square opening and an excellent flight of stairs beyond.

The Cabinet fumbled through dizzily and the panel swung into place behind them; while, a little below, Zarapa called serenely:

"We shall join hands? It is in this direction one finds the engine-room, and quite deserted. And here, *señors*, the engine-room and here the stairs to the back street."

He tripped on blithely through impenetrable gloom and they stumbled after, panting, muttering incoherently, laughing weirdly.

Once upon a time, long ago, they had been peace-loving confidence men, plain, staid criminals who slept in beds, ate ordinary meals, looked affectionately upon the familiar sights of New York, and asked nothing more than to remain unmolested.

Now they had met Captain Velvet and the whole world had become a nightmare; there was nothing astonishing in this wild plunge through a dusty South American cellar, it seemed to Mr. Pollard's whirling brain.

When they reached the top of this echoing iron flight Zarapa's voice came back very sanely:

"It will be well to walk as men who are without care—to mingle with the crowd, if need be, and cheer when they cheer. Somewhere behind the palacio should stand the swift automobile which my one trusted friend, Pedro Pieriera, was to have brought, but—"

He opened a door and peered out into a decidedly quiet little alley; and his voice rose gleefully:

"My faithful Pedro!"

"Is there an automobile there?" cried the Minister of Finance.

"It stands not fifty feet distant, *señor!*" the first assistant informed him. "Pedro is strangely absent, yet—"

His small anatomy had been thrust aside.

The Snake, with a bound, had

passed him, and was sweeping the dark by-way with a fevered eye; and a yelp of joy escaped the Snake, and he dashed at the black, lightless shape by the curb with the Ministers of State and War not two yards behind.

There was a steering-wheel, and the Snake's expert hand dabbed at it for an instant. There was a crank, and the Snake twirled it—and then shrieked maniac joy, for an engine hummed loudly at the first turn!

And then, since opening the little door in front would have consumed the fraction of a precious second, the Snake cleared it with a flying leap and landed on the seat.

Just one brief, backward glance he gave the rear of the car; they were scrambling in. His foot jammed down the clutch pedal; his hand tore at brake and gear levers.

James Evans, more familiarly the Snake, latterly and briefly the Minister of Finance of Santa Chanza, jerked up his foot and simultaneously leaped into his new character of demon chauffeur!

At the end of the alley a simple native, smoking and listening to the turmoil of a mob which did not interest him personally, turned his first, last, and only double somersault, passing through his doorway upside down and landing in his pretty home with his life.

On and on they roared through the darkness at frightful speed, then on up the hill that led to open country. The Snake switched on the lights and stared grimly ahead.

So abruptly that they seemed to have pitched headlong over a crest, they were on level ground again and shrieking onward, and presently Zarapa's voice screamed faintly:

"It is to pause, *señor!* We are safe! Not twenty men in all Relampago would climb that hill for pay, far less for mere vengeance!"

The Snake listened to the squeak of his oilless engine and shut it off. And incontinently, dropping where they stood, they slept.

Many hours later Robert Pollard, rousing, discovered that the sun was already high.

The Minister of Finance, too, still slumbered placidly with heels sprawled comfortably over the dashboard; and no insomnia had troubled William

Ryan, if one might judge by his thoughtful blinking as he sat with his back against a rock and studied a really remarkable panorama.

Below them lay the city and the sea—a little city at the distance and a very large ocean, with Relampago harbor a trim little puddle tucked into a niche of coast and dotted with vessels of various sizes; ahead lay a turn in the road, and as the Minister of State, aware of a splendid appetite, rose somewhat stiffly and stretched, Zarapa himself danced around the turn.

"Our location has become discovered!" he reported. "See!"

He pointed a little distance down the road they had climbed.

"The large country-house, which is closed; one sees it as a little box from the Plaza Libertad, *señor*."

He waited as Mr. Pollard studied the mansion moodily—a big place, imposing in its way, yet of no great interest to the Minister of State, for he said:

"I see it. We can't settle down there for the rest of our lives, Zarapa. How are we going to get away from this charming spot? What's beyond the mountains?"

"Additional mountains, *señor*."

"Railroad?"

"No."

Robert Pollard sighed. Mountains, railroad or anything else, they were in a bad plight at best, and he was distinctly hungry.

"Passing up this road, *señor*, there is the lake," his assistant began.

"What lake?"

"An artificial one—the reservoir of Relampago. It is there one finds the only fresh water within one hundred miles of the city, *señor*, collected with great difficulty from the mountain streams," pursued Zarapa with a certain air of proprietorship.

"In the small house at the side lives the engineer, from the end of one year to the end of the next. A lonely life, *señor*, and one—"

"He must be stocked up with food?"

"Naturally."

"We'll go and breakfast with him, and find out how we're going to get clear of this devilish country afterward," said Mr. Pollard as he prodded the Snake into wakefulness. "Crank up and come along. I'm going to walk."

He started up the road, Zarapa trotting beside him.

They made the turn and, topping a gentle slope, found the city and the country-house in sight once more; but the Minister of State paid scant attention to them as he made for the squat, square, little brick-house with the tall stack.

At at its side Zarapa halted him for a moment and pointed through the dingy window.

"A sight of some interest, *señor*," he said. "You will look?"

Mr. Pollard paused impatiently and peered.

Beyond the grime of the pane lay a little box of a room. In the center he discerned, after a time, a single big hand-wheel that might have been an elder brother to the steering apparatus of their automobile, and from its center a thick steel shaft which passed downward to disappear through the floor.

"It is the wheel which, opening or closing the great gate-valve below, supplies each drop of water to Relampago!" Zarapa informed him quite impressively. "I had thought that it would interest—"

"Something hot to eat interests me a lot more just now, Zarapa," Mr. Pollard said gloomily. "I never had such a thundering appetite in my life for—"

He stopped violently as if an invisible granite wall had been dropped before him; open-mouthed he stared at Zarapa for a moment before:

"What did you say about that wheel?"

"By three turns, *señor*, one gives to Relampago, or takes away, the life which comes with pure water from the towering mountains! By that wheel—"

"It is actually the only supply of drinking water they can get?"

"So much so that eight millions of dollars had to be spent on that reservoir, *señor*. It is a wonderful work, and when Santa Chanza spends for the public good eight millions—"

And there the cynicism of the first assistant was stilled, for his chief had gone stark, staring mad! Bulging, maniac eyes glittered in Mr. Pollard's head; he waved frantically to the Snake as he screamed:

"Come on! Quick! We've got the goods at last!"

(To be continued.)

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